

No. 25

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DAGON



KARL EDWARD
WAGNER
INTERVIEW

"THE MYSTERIES
OF THE ABYSS"

THE BOOK OF JADE

CTHULHU



WANTS YOU AT...
HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND
32^D LINCOLN ROAD, PETERBOROUGH

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June-August 1989

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Back Cover illustration
by Allen Koszowski.

Interior Artwork

Dallas C. Goffin, page 16.
Dave Carson, title designs,
pages 4, 5, 17, 45 & 53.

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Dagon is published quarterly by
DAGON PRESS, 11 WARWICK ROAD,
TWICKENHAM, MIDDLESEX, TW2 6SW.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

A 6 issue subscription to *Dagon*
in the United Kingdom costs £7.
Cheques or P/Os should be made
payable to CARL FORD. No Irish
funds.

A 6 issue subscription to the
U.S.A. costs \$20 (sea) or \$30
(air). Single issues cost \$5.
Payment to be made in U.S. \$
CASH — No cheques accepted.

6 issues to Europe cost £18 to
be made payable in English funds
only (cash or cheque drawn on
an English bank).

Australian orders and subs are
dealt with by Mark Morrison who
can be contacted at:-

29 Bass Street, Box Hill, Victoria
3128, Australia.

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We've gathered together a real witch's brew this time around, as a quick gasp at the contents page would have revealed. This issue we examine the career and work of Karl Edward Wagner in a rare interview in which he talks of his influences, thoughts on the genre, past and future projects including a new novella scheduled to appear in an upcoming edition of *Weird Tales*. Karl's work is often considered too offbeat by the majority of mainstream publishers and his short horror fiction is yet to receive a wide exposure in Britain. Hopefully, the interview will lead readers unfamiliar with the author's tales to go seek them out — they definitely deserve to be read by all genre aficionados.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the issue to regular readers will be the inclusion of several pieces of weird poetry. *Dagon* has tended to avoid publication of this form of literature in the past, not due to editorial policy, but primarily because the submissions sent in by contributors have amounted to very few pieces of weird prose truly worth preserving in this magazine. However, times change and over the past few months a steady influx of well written poetry has managed to shatter time and space and appear in my files, so here's a small trickle of the horror to come...

Mark Valentine's study of David Park Barnitz and *The Book of Jade* is, I feel, an important addition to the published studies of the works and lives of the 'decadent' poets. It is quite amazing to think that, in all probability, no more than perhaps a dozen copies of this rare book exist today. It is saddening when one realizes that there are many hundreds of neglected artists & authors of fantasy fiction, whose work may be doomed to extinction, unless granted a wider audience amongst fantasy fans of today. I hope you'll enjoy the work of David Park Barnitz & that this study of *Book of Jade* prompts further contributions devoted to such neglected weird authors, both in this magazine and others.

This issue also marks the debut to these pages of t. Winter-Damon, whose truly beautiful prose style has graced the pages of such dark tomes as *Etchings & Odysseys*, *Eldritch Tales*, *Grue Magazine*, *Fantasy Tales*, *Weirdbook* and the recent DAW collection of *The Year's Best Horror*, XIV. "On, To The Dark Port" is an excerpt from an epic 27 page poem, "Kadath/ the Vision & the Journey" scheduled for eventual publication by Randy Alain Evert's Dream House Books. We are glad to welcome "Damon" on board with our drunken sailors.

Also joining us for the first time is Mark F. Samuels, whose touching tale of a man driven to the depths of despair serves as a warning to others who might attempt to unravel "The Mysteries of the Abyss".

Pour, Oh pour the pirate sherry... Carl T. Ford.

Crawling at you

SMALL AND DEADLY

A number of interesting small press magazines have recently surfaced which should interest readers looking for a good chill. *Nocturne* #1 is a new magazine, edited by Michael J. Lotus and Vincent L. Michael, which reminds me somewhat of Harry O. Morris's brilliant *Nyctalops*. This US A4 format 'zine contains 68 pages of fiction and art representing some of the very best amateur work from the States. The editors have tended to opt for the surrealistic style of prose and art, most of which works very well. Amongst the best examples in the magazine are "The Real Wolf" by Thomas Ligotti, "The Poplars" by Jessica Amanda Salmonson, "The Eyes of the Crowd" by Bruce Boston, "Umbrellas" by Steve Rasnic Tem and "The Gentlemen of the Shade" by Richard D. Flavin. Some unnerving artwork is supplied by T. M. Caldwell & Rick Lieder, Harry E. Fassl, Lance Alexander and Thomas Wiloch, amongst others, and the layout of the magazine is quite beautiful. All in all the package represents a most valued addition to the horror small press. Copies can be obtained from their UK agent, Mark Valentine, for £4 (incl. post & packing), at 109 Oak Tree Rd., Bitterne Park, Southampton SO2 4PJ. Make all cheques payable to Mark Valentine.

Parts Magazine is an interesting item if you're into those Empire HPL movies. Each issue boasts letters, articles, interviews and art concerning the likes of Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton, and Stuart Gordon. The 'zine is a pretty informal affair, the editors introducing a rather chatty (and sometimes juvenile) approach to the production. Not intended as a "heavy" HPL 'zine, *Parts* definitely is the fanzine to read if you intend to keep up to date with the Lovecraft movie world. Each issue features about 40 photocopied A4 format pages the latest issue at the time of writing is #3 containing such pieces as "Herbert West in the Fabulous 50's in *Angels Never Die*", A Quiz to determine if you're a true Jeffrey Combs fanatic, "Fun With Decapitated Heads", and "A Reverent Look At 'Re-Animator'" and other morsels. Write to Friday Jones, *PARTS*, 451 Moody St. #134, Waltham, MA 02154, USA, for further details.

"Herbert West — Reanimator" may be one of HPL's least popular works but that hasn't stopped *Crypt of Cthulhu* #64 from publishing a round-robin sequel entitled "Herbert West — Reanimated" written by the likes of Bob Price, Peter Cannon, Will Murray, Donald Burleson and Charles Hoffman. The tale is, as one might suspect, a pastiche with more than a liberal dose of humour to it. Copies can be had from both Kadath Press and House on the Borderland, but if you intend to order direct from Bob at Cryptic Publications, note the new address: Cryptic Publications, 216 Fernwood Ave., Upper Montclair, NJ 07043, USA.

Heir of Darkness is the title of a new Cthulhu Mythos novel, by Glenn Rahman, the tale interweaves the Mythos with Nordic legend and the story of the Roman empire. Fans of Caligula will not be disappointed! The book is available from New Infinities Productions Inc., PO Box 937, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, USA. Price \$3.95 — write for postage rates.

NIGHT GAMES

Chaosium have fallen a little behind with their publication schedule concerning the *Great Old Ones*, originally due for an April release. At the time of writing (mid-May) the book hasn't yet reached the production stage. However, the fourth edition *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook has fronted which incorporates most of the material from the previous Games Workshop hardback plus several items from *Fragments of Fear*. Other productions currently being planned include a collection of 80's scenarios entitled *At Your Door*, the softbound book of *Masks of Nyarlathotep* (July release), and the *Investigator's Kit*. Keith Herber has been busy compiling *Arkham Unveiled: Secrets of the Miskatonic*, a sourcebook on the infamous witch-haunted town. *Creatures of the Dreamlands* is a follow up by Lynn Willis to Petersen's *Field Guide*.

Our Australian cousins, Mark Morrison, Penelope Love and Richard Watts have been busy with submissions, which look successful. The scenario *Tatterdemallion* mentioned by Peter Jeffery in the Black Mail column, elsewhere in this issue, has been given the nod by Chaosium. Morrison has submitted a scenario entitled "The Hills Rise Wild" for inclusion in Herber's *Arkham Unveiled* and Watts has offered a piece involving a medical student's studies in an infamous predecessor's footsteps...

Meanwhile, across the globe, the Spanish version of *Cthulhu* has appeared along with translations of *Fragments of Fear* and *The Asylum*. 2000 copies of the rulebook were sold by last Christmas and 1989 releases to the Spanish madmen include *Alone Against the Wendigo*, *Terror from the Stars*, *Fungi from Yuggoth* and *Curse of the Cthonians*. Jordi Zamarreño, one of the brains behind the projects has compiled a supplement about Spain (to be translated into English, eventually) as well as currently writing a cthulhoid column in a Spanish 'zine entitled *Lider*.

OTHER GRUE

Necroscope III: The Source by Brian Lumley, is due out from Grafton in September, to follow from Tor in the USA in October. Paul Ganley will be releasing *Elyeia* around the same time, to be followed by the sixth and final Titus Crow novel. *Iced on Aran* is the title of the fourth Hero and Eldin Dreamlands adventure, which will appear, hopefully, late this year. Headline Publishers (UK) will be releasing the Hero/Dreamlands saga starting in August/September, whilst Grafton have bought *The Transition of Titus Crow and Khai of Ancient Khem*, for their UK premier. Brian informs me that *Necroscope IV: Deadpeak* has been completed, and is about to start on the fifth and final volume in the series, to be titled *Deadpeak*. Meanwhile, for Lumley fans who can't wait that long, the latest edition of *Fantasy Tales* includes the author's "The Man Who Felt Pain" (illustrated by Jim Pitts) along with fiction by Ken Bulmer, William F. Nolan, Will Johnson, a brilliant piece by Joel Lane entitled "The Dispossessed" (illustrated by Dave Carson), and vampiric verse by Neil Gaiman. Copies can be found at most major newsagents and bookstores specialising in fantasy.

Robinson Publishing have recently published *Robert E. Howard's World of Heroes*, a paperback reprinting the very best adventures of the author's legendary supermen, including the border-mythos Kull adventure entitled "The Shadow Kingdom", Solomon Kane in "Wings in the Night", "Worms of the Earth" featuring Bran Mak Morn and "The Valley of the Worm" with Niord Worm's-Bane, amongst others. This 424 page collection is a bargain at £3.95. *Songs of a Dead Dreamer*, by Thomas Ligotti, will head the July fantasy from Robinson, this revised 244 paperback will retail at £5.99.

THE BOOK OF JADE

by Mark Valentine

There are two tantalising references in volume IV of H. P. Lovecraft's *Selected Letters*. Writing to Maurice W. Moe on September 18th, 1932 he asks — "...who could have written that nasty cynical *Book of Jade*? — internal evidence suggests a Harvard student..." And then, shortly after, in a letter to J. F. Morton on September 21st, 1932 he refers to Donald Wandrei's visit to the Harris Collection of American poetry at the John Hay Library, Brown University, in quest of the work of two obscure poets, one of whom is "an Harvard youth Park Barnitz, who killed himself after publishing a remarkable volume of decadent verse (1902) entitled *The Book of Jade* and dedicated to Baudelaire".¹

It is not clear from these comments whether Lovecraft has read *The Book of Jade* or only heard of it. His description of it as "cynical" and the allusion to "internal evidence" suggest he has at least browsed through it, yet it does not appear in the catalogue of his library compiled by Joshi & Michaud². And the second reference indicates that the book was not readily to hand, for Donald Wandrei has to seek it out in a particularly comprehensive library. Did Lovecraft only hear of it, therefore, from Wandrei? This must remain an open question. But it is clear at least that Lovecraft was delighted by the idea of *The Book of Jade*, as witnessed by the relish with which he mentions it.

The title of the book, its description as "decadent" and the morbidly satisfying fate of its author, all stirred my curiosity, and I sought out a copy in the library of the British Museum³. The assistant who handed me the book commented on the striking cover design. Upon the black binding is delineated a fierce goddess figure holding a sword with the title limned in ochre archaic characters beneath. The title page gives the publisher as Doxey's, At the Sign of the Lark, New York, and we learn from the reverse that the edition is limited to 600 copies. There is no mention whatever of the author before we reach the opening poem, "Prelude", whose very first lines sound the keynote for what is to follow;

I am a little tired of all things mortal;
I see through half-shut eyelids languorous...

At once we have the image of an artist in despair, weary and jaded. What follows swoons with the invocation of incense and scents, sad sinuous music, purple vestments, sacred vessels, opiate fumes; the poet portrays himself as an oriental potentate in a luxurious bower, who conjures up strange sins to keep him company. But none of this voluptuousness can serve to sustain him, for he is sated by existence; "I have had all things unto mortals given ... I have had all the pleasures known in heaven ..." The poem's sensual imagery is blunted by a bombastic roll-call of all the things the poet-sultan has seen and done; "all art, all knowledge, and all passion" have been his. But its fantastical extravagance can

have had no parallel since we were ushered by M. P. Shiel into the baroque domed chamber of Prince Zaleski ⁴.

The fifty seven poems that follow dwell upon a limited range of themes; ennui, love of death and love beyond death form a changeless refrain throughout. I have selected five of the most effective for reprinting here; it is almost certainly the first time they have appeared anywhere since the original publication of *The Book of Jade*.

"Sombre Sonnet" is one of the most graceful celebrations of the poet's saturnine vision in the book. The litany of dark things he loves even has a sense of affirmation to it, until we encounter the ultimate subject of his adoration, she ...

Within whose subtile beauty slumbereth
The twain solemnity of life and death;

The mingling of love and death is an obsession with the poet, as it was with Count Stenbock, one of the great eccentrics of the fin-de-siecle ⁵. In "Parfait Amour" this singular taste is laced with the typical decadent delight in the concept of sin, for it is not only the flavour of the grave which creates the perfect love -

Sweet incense offer'd for my bliss
Is thy corrupted breath
And on thy strained lips I kiss
The holy lips of death!

it is also -

Because my soul is utterly
Sinful unto the core -
Therefore my heart is bound to thee,
Dear love, forevermore!

"Requiem" is perhaps the most delicately composed of the verses in this vein, for the poet, even seems to regret the loss of living beauty "unto the clay" and there is gentleness in the evocation of the funeral rites - "White-rose perfume / Go with thee on thy way"; "...Odour of musk and roses / Make sweet thy crimson lips / Whereon my soul hath gone to deep eclipse". "Languor" is, by contrast, more starkly necrophiliac -

I think how pleasant such a thing must be,
That all thy lovely limbs should fall away,
And drop to nothing in their soft decay.

Then may thy buried body turn to me,
With new love on thy changed lips like fire,
And kiss me with a kiss that shall not tire.

Bodily corruption is dwelt upon in several further verses. In "The Grave" the poet refers to "the soft intolerable mouths" of the tomb-worms and there are many more such allusions. This poem is notable in that one line consists of ten repetitions of the word 'dead'. It has been suggested that this device could have influenced Donald Wandrei's poem "The Corpse Speaks" ⁶. Indeed, in *The Book of Jade* there is also a "Dead Dialogue" between "1st Corpse" and "2nd Corpse".

It is possible to view the poet's grim fixations as an expression of

his deep pessimism. In "Mankind" he observes that our lives are no more than a preparation for death ("Long time their bodies hunger for the grave"); we are "to the worm given o'er" and in reaction against this senselessness demands "When shall the earth be clean of humankind?" Furthermore, as is evident from "Corpse", the poet's desolation is intensified because he sees that only a few can see through the false glamour to the dead futility which is our true reality. Those that do are "accurst" — "the white worms call / For him".

It is little wonder that from this perspective the poet has nothing but contempt for his existence. "Life's poor processional, Time's lowly dole" he calls it in "Pride" and in "Ennui" even a vision of the seven deadly sins come in the flesh to do him homage leaves the author unmoved; "...all things are very old, / And very foolish. Please to go away". In the melody of "Rondeau" this melancholy resignation comes close to the pale purity of Ernest Dowson's verse;⁷

As shadows pass, in the misty night,
Over the wan and moonlit grass,
So passeth our glory out of sight,
As shadows pass.

The thought of oblivion is the poet's sole succour as he tells us in "Consolation" —

I knew that earth shall be for death a throne,
And evermore within their burials deep
The banded nations of the earth shall sleep,
Sunken in sepulchres of sculptur'd stone.

Although he can sometimes find temporary refuge "Within the heavy slumber-laden air" of opium; in "Poppy Song" he dreams that "the whole world fades like a fading star / Dies like the perfume of a dying rose".

It is tempting to regard all this as a pose, an affected and over-opulent tribute to the image of the poet *maudit* personified by the dedicatee, Baudelaire, and Poe, Rimbaud, Nerval, Villiers de l'Isle Adam. But there is some indication that Park Barnitz took it all very seriously. One poem in the book is more obviously personal than the rest; "Harvard", subtitled 'On His Twenty-First Year' (no doubt the source of Lovecraft's "internal evidence"). The poet appears to be lamenting the shallowness of his fellow students; "They are not beautiful; no Greek they know; / They go about and howl and make a fuss;" and his professors are no better; "through Yankee noses drooling all day long". He longs instead to "step into the great world" which may mean the wider world beyond Academe, or possibly the endlessness of death.

We do well to remember this specifically personal note in a volume which might otherwise seem to be full of wholly fabulous tableaux. "Mad Sonnet" could have been written by the narrator of a Lovecraft story, driven demented by shapeless horrors and oppressed by the ideas of a omniscient diety, memorably depicted as "that lidless Eye". It would be easy to poke fun at its extravagant declamations. Yet there is a grim insistence to it that will not go away, and I find it difficult to doubt the authenticity of that final, desperate cry; "Send thou down Death into my loathed sty!".

But what do we know of the poet? Like many other minor literary

figures, very little has been unearthed about Park Barnitz and the chance to obtain first-hand testimony has now gone. All that we have at present is what David E. Schultz, an American admirer of *The Book of Jade*, has been able to ascertain from the University of Harvard⁸. David Park Barnitz, to give the author's full name, was born on June 24th. 1878 in West Virginia. His family moved to Des Moines, Iowa four years later, Barnitz received his education here and in Kansas. He entered Harvard in 1897 and received the degrees of A.B. in 1898 and A.M. the following year. Whilst at Harvard Barnitz joined the Oriental Society. On leaving, he returned to Des Moines to pursue his literary work. The Harvard records add:- "He died very suddenly from heart trouble October 10, 1901".

Lovecraft clearly says Barnitz took his own life, though we do not know the source of his information. Certainly, it is easy to believe the author of *The Book of Jade* — who proclaims in "Sonnet of the Instruments of Death", "All ways are good wherby ye pass to God" — could die by his own hand, and, possibly, the Harvard phrase "very suddenly" is an oblique acknowledgement of the fact.

However, an account compiled from local press reports, by Harvard, clearly states death was due to natural causes and as it deals with the poet's last days it is worth quoting in full:-

"Young Mr. Barnitz has been affected with enlargement of the heart, but the family had no idea of his condition being serious. He has been unusually well this autumn, up to last Saturday night when he complained of severe pain. Tuesday he was much better and Wednesday feeling so well that he told his mother to accompany Dr. Barnitz to the synod and missionary convention at Iowa City. Wednesday evening he read for several hours, and Thursday breakfasted and lunched with his sisters, seemingly much better. After lunch he decided to rest, but after reaching the second story fell and in an instant life was extinct".

The same source also tells us a little of Barnitz's character:-

"Mr. Barnitz was very reticent, went into company but little, but was a daily prominent figure at the libraries. He detested shams of every kind, and in some of his criticisms would have been regarded severe. His tall, erect presence will be missed at the libraries and on the streets. Mr. Barnitz was devoted to his parents, sisters and brother, and was what is often termed a home boy" ⁹.

This newspaper homily may, of course, disguise as much as it tells us. It is ironic that this extract dwells in some detail on Barnitz's funeral, from which we learn "Everything was plain and simple in taste; display and ostentation being scrupulously avoided" — a remark which could hardly be made of the deceased's literary work. It is, perhaps, significant that "There was no sermon or address", but otherwise the only note outside of the conventional obsequies is that "Vases of autumn leaves, of which he was very fond, were placed about the parlor".

We are lead to expect, from the author's constant dwelling upon death as the domain of the worm, that he is entirely sceptical of the survival of the soul. Yet there are indications to the contrary in his work. In "The House of Youth" he describes with mingled hate and longing a place "that flames with light and song" and concedes: "Of all the things that

have been made so'er / Only the House remains, a quenchless fire". And in one of the last poems of the Book, "At the End of the Century", he seems quickened by a new vision — "Now in my spirit that sat for a time in the darkness of mourning / Waketh in gladness the mystical dawn" and, perhaps, ominously, he proclaims "Drink and make merry; farewell! I am here with you now; on the morrow / Sail I over the mighty sea".

Whatever we may suppose to survive of David Park Barnitz, there is no doubt *The Book of Jade* is an extraordinary memorial to him, and for all its lapses into immaturity and incongruity it is an unparalleled piece of rich grotesquerie which must take a higher place in the history of fantastic literature than has hitherto been its fate¹⁰.

It must rank as a final irony that the preservation of its reputation should be due to remarks made almost in passing by H. P. Lovecraft, in what he could only have supposed would remain entirely private correspondence. Even unwittingly, the author of *Supernatural Horror in Literature* extends his critical influence over the decades...

* * * * *

Notes

- ¹ H. P. Lovecraft *Selected Letters IV*, edited by August Derleth and James Turner, Arkham House 1976, pp 66 and 69. The year of publication given in *The Book of Jade* is actually 1901, not 1902.
- ² *Lovecraft's Library: A Catalogue*, compiled by S. T. Joshi and Marc A. Michaud, Necronomicon Press 1980. The editors point out, however, that the catalogue cannot be complete.
- ³ The British Library hold copy number 45 of the edition of 600.
- ⁴ See "The Race of Orven" in *Prince Zaleski*, (1895).
- ⁵ Count Stanislaus Eric Stenbock (1859-95) was an Estonian nobleman and one of the most bizarre figures of the decadent era. His poetry *The Shadows of Death* (1893) and short stories *Studies of Death* (1894) evince a macabre fascination with the lure of extinction.
- ⁶ *Studies in Weird Fiction* #3, Necronomicon Press, 1988, pp 13, footnote. S. T. Joshi records that Steven J. Mariconda pointed out to him the possible derivation.
- ⁷ For a brief note on Ernest Dowson, see *Aklo I*, Caermaen Books, 1988, pp 52. It would be interesting to know how familiar Barnitz was with the work of the English decadents. Certainly there are more apparent echoes of Dowson, Stenbeck, Shiel and others than of Baudelaire.
- ⁸ David Schlitz's research is at present unpublished and so I am all the more indebted to him for sharing this information with me.
- ⁹ I am grateful to Harvard University Archives for supplying me with a copy of the biographical information they have on Barnitz.
- ¹⁰ S. T. Joshi tells me there is a possibility Necronomicon Press may reprint *The Book of Jade*. It is certainly hoped this will be done.

Excerpts from
THE BOOK OF JADE



by David Park Barnitz

REQUIEM

*White-rose perfumes
Go with thee on thy way
Unto thy shaded tomb;
Low music fall
Lightly as autumn leaves
About thy solemn pall;
Faint incense rise
From many a censer swung
Above thy closed eyes;
And the sounds of them that pray
Make thy low bier an holy thing to be,
That all the beauty underneath the sun
Carries unto the clay.*

*Odour of musk and roses
Make sweet thy crimson lipps
Whereon my soul hath gone to deep eclipse;
Poppies' and violets' scent
Be for thy burial lent
And every flower that sweetest smell discloses.*

*Upon thy breast,
Before which all my spirit hath bow'd down,
White lilies rest;
And for a crown upon thy mortal head
Be poppies red.*

*And for eternal peace
Be poppies strown upon thy holy eyes,
Till also these shall cease
Turning to that which man is when he dies.
And poppies on thine unassuaged mouth
Be strown, until death shall be done with thee,
Until the white worms shall be one with thee.*

SOMBRE SONNET

*I love all sombre and autumnal things,
Regal and mournful and funereal,
Things strange and curious and majestic,
Whereto a solemn savour of death clings:*

*Coerulean serpents mark'd with azure rings;
Awful cathedrals where rich shadows fall;
Hoarse symphonies sepulchral as a pall;
Mad crimes adorn'd with bestial blazonings.*

*Therefore I love thee more than aught that dies,
Within whose subtle beauty slumbereth
The twain solemnity of life and death;*

*Therefore I sit beside thee far from day
And look into thy holy eyes away,
They desolate eyes, thine unillumin'd eyes.*

MAD SONNET

*Lo, in the night I cry out, in the night,
God! and my voice shall howl into the sky!
I am weary of seeing shapeless things that fly,
And flap into my face in their vile flight!*

*I am weary of dead things that crowd into my sight,
I am weary of hearing horrible corpses that cry,
God! I am weary of that lidless Eye
That comes and stares at me, O God of light!*

*All, all the world is become a dead blur,
God! God! and I, stricken with hideous blight,
Crouch in the black corners, and I dare not stir.*

*I am aweary of my evil plight.
If thou art not a dead corpse in the sky
Send thou down Death into my loathed sty!*

SONNET OF THE INSTRUMENTS OF DEATH

*Adorned daggers, ruby-hilted swords;
Huge mortal serpents in gold volumes roll'd;
All-holy poisons in wrought cups of gold;
Unfailing crucifixes of strong cords;*

*Mortal baptismal waters without fords,
Wherein lie death's communicants untold -
Which of these instruments blessed and old,
Is meetest for life's purple-robed lords?*

*Ye that commune in death's ciborium,
Of all the vessels in his sacristy
Which will ye choose to make you a clod -*

*Sharp swords, bright lightnings, orient opium? -
All these, brave souls, are of one sanctity;
All ways are good whereby ye pass to God.*

CORPSE

*A dead corpse crowned with a crown of gold
Sits thron'd beneath the sky's gigantic pall;
Gold garments from it's rotten shoulders fall,
And regal purple robes funereal.*

*Before its face a vast processional
Goes by with offerings for its great knees cold;
Its soft hand doth a golden sceptre hold;
And its flesh lie sleeping worms uproll'd.*

*They that pass ceaseless by see not at all;
They know not that beneath its garments fold
Is but a corpse, rotted, and dead, and tall.*

*He is accurst that sees it dead and old;
He is accurst that sees: the white worms oall
For him; for him have funeral dirges toll'd.*

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for help in the quest for *The Book of Jade* and its author from Nicholas Blinko (who first told me about it), Roger Dobson, W. S. Doxey, Carl T. Ford, S. T. Joshi and especially David E. Schultz.



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GASLIGHT & GHOSTS



Edited by
Stephen Jones & Jo Fletcher

GASLIGHT & GHOSTS is an anthology of the marvellous, the magical and the macabre to celebrate The 1988 World Fantasy Convention, held in London. Inside this unique volume are articles, fiction and artwork by some of the finest practitioners of the *fantastique* from both sides of the Atlantic, including:

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ISBN:	O 951389 20 3	Category:	Fiction
Price:	£9.95	Pub. date:	27 October 1988
Binding:	Hardback	Pages:	270pp
Ills:	b/w & colour	Cover:	Full colour
Format:	220 x 140mm	Discount:	35% on 5 or more

The 1988 World Fantasy Convention,
London, U.K.

in association with
Robinson Publishing

130 PARK VIEW, WEMBLEY, MIDDX. HA9 6JU, ENGLAND





The Red Brain's Trust



edited by Peter F. Jeffery

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First of all — an important announcement. At the time of writing it looks as though I am about to move house again. I do not know where I will be living when these words are published — possibly I will be leaving Leicester. This being so, I suggest that anyone with queries for the Red Brain should send them to Carl in Twickenham, so that he may forward them to me.

A few of you may suppose that a move will at least settle the problem of blood dripping through my ceiling. Such foolish mortals do not understand this type of blood at all. The professor upstairs has promised that it will continue to vex me. As it happens, I am not too worried by the prospect. I have discovered that the mixture of blood and acid makes an excellent fertilizer for certain plants which will soon be spreading their seeds into the professor's sepulchre.

I have some further information on three matters raised in previous appearances of this column. The *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook lists an abominable tome entitled *Monstres and Their Kynde*. Long ago, I was asked to trace the thing to its source — something which I failed to do. Others have now done what I could not do. The eldritch tome is treated in "Horror at Vecra" by Henry Hasse. It first appeared in *The Acolyte* Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall 1943 and has now been reprinted in *Crypt of Cthulhu* No. 59, Michaelmas 1988.

More recently, I had a request for jelly fish horrors. I have received this notable contribution on the subject from Penelope Love, the eminent Victorian:

"*Jelly fish*. Terrifying things. There is a species in the Pacific, off the coast of Queensland, called the 'sea wasp'. Almost transparent, they have tentacles reaching lengths of 20 feet, which are 'damn near impossible' to spot. If stung by one, you have approximately 3 minutes to find help. Then your nervous system is paralysed & your brain stops telling your heart to beat. Fortunately they only occur during summer — don't go sea-swimming off the Queensland coast Dec-February".

If I am ever in Queensland, I shall bear Penny's advice in mind. They make their own native jelly fish seem almost lovable.

The third left over matter stems from *Dagon* #24, in which I included Jeff Salmon's speculation that Llanelly might be a Deep One city. I was hoping for a confirmation or denial of this from *Dagon*-reading inhabitants of Llanelly. The nearest so far received is the interesting information that D.F. Lewis' father comes from Llanelly. In view of this, it may make a Deep One city seem positively benign.

I have received an enquiry from Ian Bond of Cape Cornwall as to the correct way of pronouncing the names of the Mythos beings. The matter was treated at length in "Mythos Names and How to Say Them" by Robert M. Price (*Dagon* #15, Nov-Dec. 1986). My first inclination was to refer Mr. Bond to Mr. Price's

excellent article, but it occurs to me that many current *Dagon* readers probably lack a copy of issue 15, so I will venture a little on the subject. To take the best-known name, Cthulhu, Lovecraft himself said: "The best approximation one can make is to grunt, bark, or cough the imperfectly-formed syllables *Cluh-Lhu* with the tip of the tongue firmly fixed to the mouth" (*Selected Letters* V p.302). However, Mr. Price produces evidence to show that Lovecraft actually pronounced it in a variety of other ways "Koot-u-Lew", "Tulu" with both u's long, and so on. Lovecraft also compared it to "the sound a man makes when he tries to imitate a steam-whistle" (*Selected Letters* V p.11). (See *Dagon* #15 p.3)

To take a different example, Mr. Price seems to consider that the "th" in "Nyarlathotep" should be rendered somewhat as that of "maths". However, perhaps we are to take the "hotep" as the Egyptian verb "to be satisfied", or the like, as in such names as Amenhotep, Ptahhotep and Neferhotep. Names like Amenhotep and Ptahhotep certainly mean Anen or Ptah (or other diety) is satisfied. I imagine that their mothers prayed to the diety named, for their baby's safe birth. The "nefer" of Neferhotep means "beauty is fulfilled". If this is the origin of the "hotep", Nyarlathotep should certainly be pronounced so that the "t" and the "h" are separate sounds, with a syllable break between them. The "h" of "hotep" is not the same as an English "h" sound, but an aspirated h, strictly it should be printed with a dot underneath.

It may well be, however, that my opinions on Mythos pronunciation are heretical. I pronounce the end of Tsathoggua very much like the words "you are". As far as I may gather, few if any others have even considered that possibility, which is the one I selected naturally. It seems almost universally agreed that the "ua" is not "you are", but "wah". That has not changed the way I pronounce the name, though.

As Lovecraft himself pointed out, the names are intended to be ones used by alien creatures with alien vocal apparatus, so that they "could never be uttered perfectly by human throats" (*Selected Letters* V p.11). This being so, asking how they should be pronounced may be to miss the whole point of these strange combinations of letters. That certainly applies to such names as Cthulhu, if not so such as Nyarlathotep, which has the look of human syllables. Indeed, Nyarlathotep may provide an instructive illustration - I wonder how many *Dagon* readers can manage a convincing aspirated h, and that is a human consonant, not an alien one. Personally, I can not get my mouth round all of the sounds of French - not so as to elicit comprehension from French people. Much less could I produce a satisfactory imitation of the clicking sounds featured in Hottentot languages. I cannot whistle at all, so I cannot, with Lovecraft, even attempt "to imitate a steam-whistle". So it goes. I think the answer must be to pronounce such names as Cthulhu as one pleases - there is no possibility of doing so "correctly".

That is, I fear, more or less it for this time. I had hoped to be able to present *Dagon* readers with my impressions of the Strange High House. I looked for the place, but I must have missed it in the bloody fog.

* * * * *

The Mysteries of the Abyss

by Mark F. Samuels

"I have sometimes amused myself by endeavouring to fancy what would be the fate of any individual gifted, or rather accursed, with an intellect very far superior to that of his race....This subject is a painful one indeed. That such individuals have so soared above the plane of their race, is scarcely to be questioned; but, in looking back through history for traces of their existence, we should pass over all biographies of "the good and the great" while we search carefully the slight records of wretches who died in prison, in Bedlam, or upon the gallows".

Man And Superman, Edgar Allan Poe.

Gin Joe lay in a puddle of urine inside a doorway's arch and shivered with the cold. Clutched in his hand was a half-bottle of scotch that an inebriated city lout had tossed into a litter bin after being violently sick on his way home the previous night. Joe had retrieved the precious treasure from amongst the confusion of dirty newspapers, cans and sticky debris, hardly believing his luck in finding the bottle still three-quarters full.

The glowing numbness of the alcohol went some way to thwarting the designs of the freezing air. His fingers and toes tingled on the borderline of extreme pain and his breath came in gasps, little puffs of condensation floating about the porch shadows.

It was 8.30 pm, a Friday evening in the centre of London. Gin Joe heaved his aching body up from the damp steps and stumbled out onto the street. He almost collided into a portly businessman with his first step. With an exclamation of disgust, the man side-stepped Joe, his cheeks turning crimson with indignation, before finally hurrying away into the night with the tramp's mocking laughter still ringing in his ears.

Gin Joe shuffled onwards, trying to recollect where he now stood and whether there were any doss houses nearby. He was so muddled his only destination tonight would be the place where all the worst misfortunates eventually gravitate; the railway bridge near the Embankment, that is, unless Dublin Mary found him first and dragged him downstream to join up with the other Irish destitutes. Inevitably, in a state of total confusion, Joe would find himself passing the grey hours in a blanket of piss-soaked newspapers and a soiled cardboard box for a bed.

The blinding glare of the streetlights and shop windows surrounded him. Somehow, he had strayed from the secluded backstreets onto a main thoroughfare. It was obvious that in this plush area, Joe's presence would stand out like a sore thumb. Hordes of immaculate shop-dummies surged past him, their mouths agape upon discovering this creature of the pit amongst them,

each held hard eyes and sneering lips.

"Get out!", They screamed soundlessly, "You don't *belong* here".

Joe swore aloud, swigging alternately at the life giving bottle, and savouring the fire it brought to his throat and stomach. They were right, though, he did not belong here. Gazing at his reflection in a shop window revealed why. With his straggly, iron-grey beard and greasy hair, his drink fuddled stare, stinking clothes and worn out shoes, he was certainly not one of them. He was the living symbol of madness, disease and death. He was reality and all those around him, wrapped in their fashionable robes and perfumed with expensive colognes, were steeped in illusion. God! he was like some grisly revenant!

Looking upwards, Joe witnessed a maze of multicoloured lights, all strewn across the sky, from building to building. They disappeared around the crescent of the avenue's vast curve, pillared facades and jeweled trees rose up before him.

With a dim sense of recognition stirring within him, Gin Joe realised where he was and what was happening around him. This was Christmas week, and elegant Regent Street was cloaked in its traditional festive splendour. People rushed by, clutching boxes and plastic bags. He did not, especially at this time, wish to have their cheery spirits stained with visions of an old wretch. Past memories seemed to waver at the edge of his mind, thoughts of a time long ago when he too was a part of all this.

Then, to his left, loomed a narrow alley, dark and inviting, far removed from the spectacle all around. Clutching his tatty jacket closer to his body, Joe fled into the escape route.

He fell into a sheltered niche, the entrance to a small set of offices, his teeth chattering as Joe wrenched the bottle from his pocket. The temperature was falling towards minus centigrade and would probably grow colder as the night wore on. Gin Joe breathed onto his hands, pausing to cough incessantly in vain attempts to force bronchial mucus up from his lung passages.

Back there, memories from long ago had returned; those years of employment spent in a tiny bookshop, endless days spent locked away in a dingy, ill-lit basement enumerating volume after volume of esoteric gibberish; the compilation of a book-seller's series of pamphlets. The proprietor had collected together a hoarde of occult treatises, all of which passed before Joe's eyes and which had to be scanned for a brief note to be written upon it.

And as Joe had read more and more of the curious tomes; Latin volumes on astrology, alchemy and magic; modern editions on telepathy and psychokinesis; the Kabbala; the Golden Dawn, so he came to believe that somehow these fragments were but tiny pieces to a vast jigsaw, that, once completed, would be the key to discovering the great mysteries of life and death.

That dusty basement, stuffed with aromatic old books and awash with a sea of papers, became an obsession with him. Joe was convinced that a terrible secret lurked amongst the scattered knowledge therein, a prize that could unite the superstition of the primal swamp with the future metaphysics and thus sweep away the science of today's world.

Someone was shouting at him. Shouting and swearing. Joe looked upwards, his head tilted awry. The door behind him had opened and a cluster of

office party-goers stared down, wailing in laughter, some sent sharp kicks into his ribs and another poured a glass of wine on to his head.

"Clear off, you old bastard", shouted one of the louts, "You're in our way".

Joe managed to heave his body from the door and was about to get up and swear back when the largest of the bunch, a clean-shaven thug with a grey pin striped suit, kicked him hard in the rear, sending Joe tumbling into the gutter. Amid roars of laughter the crowd bundled into a nearby car, driving off into the night.

It took Joe five whole minutes to rise, his body aching and limbs trembling. Slowly, with great effort, he pushed himself forwards; aimlessly, meaninglessly, he wandered on through the streets. Jesus, the weather was terrible. Snow might fall soon. The sky was a blur of sodium-orange masses, the streetlights reflected off low, menacing clouds. Yet this was Christmas time, it never snowed properly until the middle of January.

The front of a shop window sported a large poster suggesting: 'Spend Your Xmas in Sunny Florida'. Joe leaned closer to examine the details. Rows of bodies, like slabs of butcher's meat, candidates for skin-cancer, sprawled on white sands before a cyan sea. He sneered before moving on, to stop for too long would slow down his circulation. Joe had to keep moving and discover somewhere to shelter for the night, though, the way he was feeling, it would be a miracle if he lasted until dawn. His breathing grew worse, the clogged lung passages growing narrower due to the freezing air. The wheezing and gasping grew noisy as hell and his chest felt tight and very painful. It had never so bad before. Joe dug into his pocket for the scotch bottle. A desperate cry gurgled in his throat as he realised that it was now empty and he threw the glass across the street where it shattered on the pavement opposite, sending glittering shards and a resounding crash into the darkness. Shards of glass just like that old scattered jigsaw — all those years ago...

Hadn't he put the pieces together? Finally, after exhaustive study, of filtering out the worthless to reach the answer, he had. Naturally, all those around him had thought Joe had gone mad. They mocked his theories, derided his revelations: it is impossible to rationalize an unreasoning universe, save through a disordered approach; insanity is the restructuring of the mind in accordance with evolutionary advancement and heightened perception. Life is a freak accident, a multiplying disease on earth, a cancer cell in the otherwise sterile and perfect Universe. He'd proved it, yet...

The sight of a twenty-four hour supermarket brought him back to himself. Joe stood on Shaftsbury Avenue, the long curved scythe of a street, where the gaudy fronts of a dozen gaudy plays towered above. All lights and flair, all greasepaint and affectation. Joe rummaged through his pockets, if he was lucky he would have enough change to pay for a bottle of cheap wine. His fingers were cold and numb, but he retrieved two coins from amongst the snot-encrusted handkerchiefs. His very life hinged on whether they were pound coins. His luck was in.

Stepping into the supermarket, it was as if someone had thrown a warm blanket over him, the sudden rise in temperature was a blissful experience. He was more acutely aware of the coldness of his flesh, though. He had hoped to wander around, pretending to have enough money to buy a number of items, but, as always, faces turned towards him in disgusted shock. No, —

there was no chance of it. He was a filthy stain on this pristine, super-hygienic oasis — he had to leave. He hurried past the aisles, trying to ignore the fact that he hadn't eaten for two days, but his craving for alcohol was high. Drink brought a measure of numb oblivion from the world and those foggy memories that impinged upon him increasingly of late. His mouth watered at the sight of the alcohol on display and he considered the act of theft, but the looming eyes of a hovering shelf-packer were upon him. Swiftly grabbing a bottle of the only wine his money could buy, he edged closer to the cash desk. A young woman with bright crimson lipstick and a tight fitting miniskirt sat at the checkout and Joe couldn't help tracing the length of her long, stockinged legs from ankle to thigh with hungry eyes, despite the fact that sex with her would probably kill him.

Somewhat reluctantly, with bottle in hand, Joe shuffled towards the exit. As he stepped outside the blast of the freezing air felt like iced water all around him and his lungs, momentarily relieved by the supermarket's warmth, once more heaved in agitation, sucking in oxygen ineffectually, his lips opening and closing like a bloated fish out of water. The traffic swept past in confusion, a mass of head lamps and engine noise, vehicle after vehicle, in an endless line. He couldn't remember what had driven him onto these well-trodden paths, why he wasn't languishing, as usual, in some hostel, surrounded by disease, dirt and decay. Perhaps he had fled from the tuberculosis, the depression and schizophrenia, the piercing screams and imbecile grins, the cockroaches that whirled and clicked on the icy floors.

Joe heaved up a mouthful of yellow phlegm and watched it stoop towards the pavement. His chest felt like a vice around his lungs and his teeth chattered brutally. He stood at the corner of Cecil Court, and opened the wine bottle with his old Swiss army knife. As he savoured the liquid streaming down his throat he gazed at all the bookshops that surrounded him. All those shops that he had frequently visited in his quest for knowledge made him recall the past once more...

Made him remember the tomes of psychological and physiological works that he'd scanned, tracing patterns of abnormality; Mankind preparing to undertake the evolutionary leap into insanity and morbid disease. A new order of human-beings, resplendent in their mental and physical empathy with the Universe — the mindless, shattered Universe.

It was all there, contained within a thousand medical journals and casebooks, just waiting to be pieced together; the grand destiny of mankind. How the mindless herd, veiled for so long by their flimsy illusions, would feel the darkness creep within them!

Joe got up, coughing incessantly, the tears collecting in the corners of his eyes. His face turned an unhealthy shade of red as he stretched out a hand to the wall to steady his steps along Cecil Court. Sense of direction was rapidly diminishing as a combined effect of the drink and fever. Yet, he knew, that should he cease drinking the delirium would overwhelm him. Strange hallucinations set upon his mind, alcohol induced dreams & sickness visions combined to force Joe into a lost maze of alleyways that twisted and turned like a subterranean labyrinth.

As he progressed, he saw that each streetlamp was old and ornately designed, releasing a flickering light that seemed gas induced rather than electrical. The houses around him bore unmistakeable signs of

antiquity; porticos with iron pillars, carved balconies, bay windows and gambrel roofs. It seemed as if Gin Joe had stumbled into Georgian London, the area was like a time capsule of elder architecture, a hidden city behind the confusion of courtyards and squares, a jewel of opiate antiquity.

Narrow alleyways with streetposts, arched portals leading into innumerable backstreets, Joe wandered through a thousand of them. At one point, he found himself trekking up a cliff-like road which was incredibly steep, half crawling, wheezing in the darkness. The route was choked with tall and sinister houses, their black windows staring outwards with blind eyes. At the very summit of the hill, Joe sat down on an old stone bench to gaze at the surroundings below.

Spread out before him lay the city, its sparkling lights peppered the shadows and glowed on a thousand clustered rooftops and chimneystacks, row after row. London's dreaming church spires stood tall and proud in the night air over huddled lanes and thoroughfares. Bare, leafless trees sighed in the chilly wind, swaying endlessly and, away to the east, Joe could make out the dome of St. Paul's, looking like some fabulous Greek temple. The low clouds had now cleared and the sky shone bright with a multitude of stars. Out towards the south lay the Thames, its green and murky waters flowing through the city's heart and joining the hazy stream of the milky way on the distant horizon.

Willing his stiff, frozen limbs into life, Gin Joe clambered off the bench and started down the steep hill, back the way he had came. His mind was a seething maelstrom of delirium. The streets passed like black corridors as he staggered and stumbled along, the pain in his chest surging with each new step, forcing mucus up and down his throat with every gasp. His eyes found difficulty in focusing and the falling temperature had long since snatched all sensation from his limbs. The wine, like the scotch before it, had now run dry and Joe now teetered on the brink of the abyss. People around him seemed to be grotesque monkeys parading in human clothing as if acting out some absurd play.

Gin Joe fell forwards, and clutched desperately at a streetpost. Again, the old memories returned to haunt him. Subjective perception, he had discovered, was every thing, our five senses and genetic pattern of thoughts determined the reality around us. He recalled his real name, not the drunken "Gin Joe", but Joseph Hammond, and remembered too of that night he'd decided to abandon the trappings of the prosaic world that held him. To meditate on madness, death and disease; to break through to that higher consciousness of reality in drink-induced delirium, to achieve the immortal goal: reconciliation with the cosmos. For it was there, in the abyss, that the answers lurked.

Someone had taken his arm. Dublin Mary stood there smiling with a mouth of missing teeth and gazing with a single eye. She gabbled something and then pulled away, leading him on. This was it, he'd become a 'down and out'. The cough in his lungs had now developed into chronic bronchitis, his mind had become lost in drink and insanity. It was all a spiralling circle of depression since the bookshop days. He had discovered the truth and the grim revelations were now taking their dues.

Some distance east, along the Banks of the Thames, Dublin Mary guided Gin Joe. He was in a bad way, coughing up his guts and pouring out a dialogue of incoherent nonsense. Ahead of the two, huddled around a puny fire, sat a bunch of tramps, like mutant survivors of a nuclear holocaust.

They turned towards the newcomers briefly, and, recognizing them, turned back to the orange glow of the flames. As usual Gin Joe was lost in his crazy talk and Mary had rescued him from a kicking by Police boots. For a time, when he was close to the fire, he persisted in garbling some rubbish about a "great secret", but after guzzling Dublin Mary's meths, Joe crawled away to his piss-soaked newspapers and the stained cardboard box, coughing with frightening intensity.

It was Dublin Mary who found Joe dead come the morning. It had been a bad night, the coldest for years.

Coughed up blood had dribbled down the dead man's chin and lay there frozen, his blue lips were shut tight and covered with frost crystals. Dublin Mary began to weep as she lay their only blanket over the lifeless body.

* * * * *

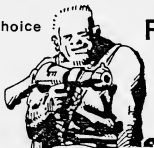
CAERMAEN'S "HAUNTER"

Caermaen Books latest release is a comic strip adaptation of HPL's "The Hunter of the Dark", a splendid piece of work by promising artist John Coulthart. The production standard and printing of the booklet is quite beautiful and I have to say readers won't find a better example of a Lovecraftian comic strip. Limited to 500 copies, *The Hunter of the Dark* can be had for £2.50 plus £1 postage and packing from Mark Valentine, 109 Oak Tree Road, Southampton, SO2 4PJ.

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ON, TO THE DARK PORT

A Tribute to Howard Phillips Lovecraft

by t. Winter-Damon

(excerpt from KADATH / the Vision and the Journey...)

Catching the breeze-borne jingle of caravaneer's bells
of silver,
Stepping lightly through the meadows, swarming
With butterflies — like Cathay's fantastic rainbow kites.
Wading waist-deep through the gently swaying emerald blades.
On. On. Past thatched farmsteads, 'neath arcing spans
across the Skai.
Then, at last! On horizon's black spires I set my sights —

Quays of basalt lapped by sapphire tides. Trade winds heady
With strange incense. Dark, brooding taverns fevered
with the smoke
Of thagweed and the sweat of Lotus Eaters' waking nightmares...
"Beware!" the drunken sailors whispered,
"Beware the sinister black galleys, that oft-times dock
in Dylath-Leen!
Trade not with turbaned ruby merchants —
By the Gods! avoid their snares!"

Long I sought —
For Kadath,
In the high, cold waste.
"Sample not their reeling, giddy liquor!
Drawn from flasks of carven ruby!
Slavery and death lie in their taste!"

"Too brisk the stroke-beat of their three-tiered oar-banks!..."
"Uncouth the bicorned fashion of their turbans!..."
"Right devilish their mincing walk!..."
"Rubies for gold..and..fat, black slaves from Parg —
Purchased by the pound!..."
Can I convey those horrid implications hinted in the sailors'
talk?

Blow Lamps and Wicked Milk

An Interview with Karl Edward Wagner

by Carl T. Ford

Karl Edward Wagner's horror fiction represents a relatively small part of his contribution to the genre. As well as being editor and co-publisher of *Carcosa*, a small-press imprint specialising in beautifully produced tones of terror, Wagner is also editor for DAW Books award winning series *The Year's Best Horror Stories*. Karl rarely gives interviews these days, but following a little bribery with the aid of a bottle of "J.D." and the promise of a fix up with some "wicked milk", he finally agreed.

I traced the last surviving member of "The Wild Bunch" to Dave Carson's flat where, amid the whores, broken whiskey bottles and empty cans of Tennants Super I found Wagner, Carson and the Aztec Mummy ("My, what a bunch!") reciting lines from Sam Peckinpah movies. Amid the ensuing chaos of machine gun fire, Meatloaf records and zombie movies, the following interrogation took place. I played my straw right out to the end...

Dagon: Aside from writing horror and fantasy you have a pretty impressive background in medicine and psychology. What made you give up the medical profession in favour of writing fiction full time?

Wagner: Because I'd much rather write. I've been trying to write since I was about sixteen years old. The first Kane story I finished was in 1962. I used to lie about the house during summer vacations, and my parents kept saying "Why don't you get a job?" and I'd say "Because I'm writing". I finally got a chance when I was at medical school. I started selling books and, after dodging the draft at Vietnam and a few other things, I finished night school and the books I had been writing continued to sell so I thought I'd like to make a living doing this. So I quit medicine and never once looked back. It was a bitch of a job.

Dagon: You've written a number of tales relating the exploits of the immortal warrior-necromancer, Kane. For those readers possibly unfamiliar with this creation can you fill us in with a few details regarding the Kane myth?

Wagner: The idea of Kane came from all the villains that I saw as heroes, derived from reading books, comics and watching movies: the bad gun-fighter who would get shot down, who was really faster than the good guy. Good always had to win so I thought I'd write about a villain who always wins. Villains always had to be either like Fu Manchu, or intensely intelligent super scientific geniuses, but they couldn't really break somebody in half, or else they were big hulking creatures like Rondo Hatton. So I thought what happens if you got the super intelligent villain who *could* break somebody in half if he wanted to?

That's how Kane came about. He was a villain who was going to win at the end and be smart enough to control the situation when things got bad. If he had to mow down sixty other people he could handle that, that is if he didn't summon up something supernatural in the process. I thought let's do something totally all out, and that's Kane.

Kane's closest equivalent is probably *The Terminator*. Kane is artificially created, but is an extraordinarily intelligent and manipulative person. He is a self-healing killing machine that was designed with free will. Kane is not a common Conan clone. Kane is something that is pre-human and exceedingly capable but who usually ends up on the losing side of causes. Why he keeps doing this, I have no idea, maybe it's because he always picks the right side and the right side is always the losing side.

Dagon: Your medical training has obviously given rise to a number of plot lines in your fiction, most notably "The Fourth Seal" which revolves around doctors creating plagues in order to keep their profession busy. Were any of these characters based on real people? And have any other of your tales been written as a direct result of your medical background?

Wagner: Yes, all the conversations in "The Fourth Seal" are from medical schooldays. I'm expanding this story into a novel now. The premise of that story was that there's a secret cabal of doctors who are creating diseases to control politics and to wipe out enemies. And to, basically, keep medicine going, as, if you kill all the diseases where would all the doctors be? Since I wrote that story we have had Aids, toxic shock syndrome & Legionnaire's disease. The novelisation will incorporate Aids as being something which has been unleashed in public as a political weapon.

The other story I did which has been based on my medical experiences is a short story called "Unto These Hands" which is almost totally autobiographical about my experiences during my psychiatric residency at a state mental hospital in North Carolina. The hospital is actually Hell and the psychiatrist who is running the hospital is Satan.

Dagon: How do you go about preparing your fiction? Can you give readers a few insights into the step by step methods of your writing process?

Wagner: Helter Skelter! Something comes on me and I'll work on it for a time. I'll go a year without writing a word, or write 20,000 words in a day, usually on a chemical enhancement. For the past year I've been working on a novel that came to me last year in London and I work on that in fits and starts, but if I get lured into something I want to do then I do it. My process is very primitive and that's probably because the way I learned to write was by getting a copy of *Something About Cats and Others*, the Arkham House book of Lovecraft's little bits and pieces. It had some photographs of a little Lovecraft manuscript which was just written down and scattered with annotations in the margin & everything. At the time I was about 14 or 15 years old and I looked at that and said well, if that's how Lovecraft writes that's how I'll do it. So I'll sit down with a pencil and paper (just recently I've got so high-tech as to use a ball-point pen and paper), and write it all down in longhand. Once I've got it all down I'll scribble on annotations and stuff which noone could possibly transcribe off me. Then I'll type it all up on my beat up old portable typewriter I've had since college days - with one finger - I can't type, so I

use one hand to work the space bar and pound away with the index finger of my right hand, which is about two inches shorter than it was when I started out. All of my stuff has been written on that same old battered typewriter. If anything should happen to it I don't know what I'd do — probably quit!

Dagon: Several of your tales have been written as variants or tributes to tales by past masters of the macabre. "The River of Night's Dreaming" features a schizophrenic who becomes trapped in a fantasy based on R.W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow*; "Sticks" is a nod to the Lovecraftian mythos and you've developed Robert E. Howard's pulp hero Conan, too. Have you thought of building on themes originated by any other fantasy writers?

Wagner: Well, "Blue Lady, Come Back", in *Why Not You And I?*, was inspired by Raymond Chandler. He's probably one of the key influences in my writing. Chambers has been a major influence, he once said that he tried to create a liberate barrier between the reader and final comprehension. I liked that idea. Nightmares should never really make sense, if you try to explain everything it becomes dull. You know... "Oh that's what happened, it's the guy with the chainsaw that came in and killed all those people, I understand that". That's boring. You should wonder "What the hell is going on here? It's like a nightmare!". "Where the Summer Ends" in *In A Lonely Place* is a modern re-write of Chambers's "The Yellow Sign". Carlsberg has also been an inspiration for my stuff (laughs). Basically, I see an effect I like and I try to figure out "Why did I like that?". So I go back and try to recreate the technique. I see something I like and try to understand what that person is doing, so then I can use that technique to create the effect I want.

Dagon: Your Machen variant, "220 Swift" is a little different from the majority of your tales in respect that it features a protagonist who finds himself *drawn* to the horrors he encounters and not repulsed by them. Do you find the thought of 'degenerate little people', be they living in the Welsh countryside, or in the hills of Appalachia enchanting? And how much of the tale is based on actual folklore and how much is pure fiction?

Wagner: The entire story is based on actual folklore. Those are *real* books that are mentioned. Those are *real* incidents that happened. I lived in that log cabin that's described there. The tales of little people, the Appalachians, that's *real*. The lost mines of the Ancients are *real*. All the statements are actual, I didn't make it up. It's not pseudo-folklore these facts are from books, newspaper clippings and actual events. The character himself is drawn towards all this because he's descended from them. He's an albino offspring of a deranged mountain girl who was raped by these little creatures. He's a hired killer, he can't fit into society so he has become an assassin and is drawn back to his past. Although, if you recall, he left there long before he could remember, he has certain childhood memories — when they are driving up to the mine — it's his old home he is passing there. When he finds these creatures they recognise him as one of their own, only now he is bigger and stronger and literally becomes King of the Underworld.

The fantasy bits there are not historical but the historical basis for the tale, including locations, are totally factual. They are places in which I've been and some of the characters in there are people I've

known at the time — this is the summer of 1969. It's easier to use reality when you work, than just make it all up from scratch.

Dagon: Quite a few of your tales include references to rock music. Could it be said that any rock musicians or songs have provided inspiration for your stories?

Wagner: Hmmm. Tonnes of them, let's see ... Pink Floyd have been a big inspiration, and I think they have possibly been inspired by my work — their "Two Suns in the Sunset" on *The Final Cut* album [bears the same title as a tale in Wagner's short story collection *Night Winds* — ed]. Others include The Grateful Dead, The Dead Kennedys... Richard O'Brien is a friend of mine and I've used his lines from *The Rocky Horror Show* for title chapters and lines in my books. Some of the groups know of my stuff, The Dead Kennedys are fans of mine, or so I've been told. Molly Hatchet had one of the Kane covers on one of their albums. I seem to attract a kind of loud, violent following just as they attract me. Rock music is probably one of the major influences on my stuff.

Dagon: Have any of your tales been subject to censorship by editors due to their harsh portrayals of sex, drugs and rock n' roll? I notice that the tale "More Sinned Against" in the Scream Press edition was absent from the trade edition of *In A Lonely Place*.

Wagner: That tale was censored but not from there. J. N. Williamson asked me for a story for *Masques*, an anthology which he was doing, which I posted within minutes before leaving for England. I was over here for three weeks and when I got back I found out that he had been calling on my maid, (who had been watching the house), and he said "We've got to have another story from Karl — we can't use this, it's a drug story!". So I got back and find a letter from J. N. Williamson saying that he couldn't use the tale because the drug addict — (you know, this poor woman who has gone through hell) actually makes a profit at the end. And therefore that would encourage other children to take drugs, be tied up, beaten and branded and go through the porno scene... "And the publisher and I both agree, and I'm sure that you'll agree too, that if one young person read this book and decided to take drugs after reading your story you would be absolutely overwhelmed with guilt and remorse". So I'm sitting there thinking "That's an anti-drugs story, which starts out with a Hollywood whore whose world just comes apart. She manages, in the end, to triumph over this bastard and triumph over the situation". Most of my stuff is not quite that blatant. But he didn't want that. At the time Scream Press were bringing out the hardcover of *In A Lonely Place* and they wanted an original story for it — which they had to have yesterday! So I said, "Fine, here's your story". I wrote back to J. N. and said, "No problem. You're the editor. I'm a pro. You're a shit". No, I didn't say that. So I sent the thing off and got a hardcover out of *In A Lonely Place*. Otherwise the story probably wouldn't have come out for another year. That's the only censorship problem I've had though, except in Germany where any stuff is considered extreme.

Dagon: It would seem that it is now quite fashionable for writers to include explicit sex in their horror fiction. Do you think the two themes work well together?

Wagner: It depends on who you're with! (laughter). But yes, it's always

been something I've used in my own work. It's nothing new, take "Carmilla" by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, or go back to *The Monk* by Mathew Gregory Lewis — there's always been sex mixed in his stuff — and *Frankenstein*, for example. People have become a little more explicit now than ten years ago. Sex adds an edge to the fear, perhaps that's why *Psycho* is so scary. If Janet Leigh had just been walking down the street and got her head cut off it wouldn't be very exciting, but here she is all naked and taking her shower when in comes a necrophilic transvestite with a mother obsession and chops her up into bits. The scene is quite mild nowadays, compared with "Friday 13th, Part 8", but sex is probably more important than violence in horror fiction for riveting one's attention. With sexual content in there, all of a sudden you stop flipping the pages to see what happens next and you're sitting there studying intensely.

Dagon: Whilst on the subject of modern horror fiction, which authors currently working in the field do you most admire?

Wagner: M. John Harrison has come closest to what I want to do from those currently writing. Dennis Etchison — that's if he's still alive. Charles Birkin (who has recently died), Ramsey Campbell. I'm trying to think of writers who have written stuff that I've looked at which has made me think "This is totally brilliant!", or "Shit, if I'd written that story I should be proud of it". Bernard Taylor's *Sweetheart*, *Sweetheart* is brilliant. I've got a shopping list somewhere of all this stuff.

Dagon: Your fiction has developed a rather "punk" look for which you've coined the phrase "acid gothics". Will future Karl Wagner fiction continue to develop this trend?

Wagner: Acid Gothic is a term I was using in 1967, or so, when I was getting high on acid in San Francisco. The Kane stuff was described as acid gothic at the time; which was breaking the boundaries of tradition, outrageous, where the villains win and the heroes get killed. I started to think what to do with the gothic imagery — whilst on acid — Hendrix was on the stereo and you sit there reading *Melmoth, the Wanderer*. I mean, that's what happens to you man. I guess some would say I'm heading towards "Splatpunk" but that's not true. My work has always been explicit both in its use of horror and sex, and mind bending in the technique and sometimes in the brain of the writer at the time. It's not so much that I'm moving in new directions, my stuff's always been that way. It's like someone saying "Hey, Lou Reed is a really weird person — he sure can play guitar". That's the kind of position I'm in. People read my books, see the cover and think: "That's Robert E. Howard's Conan". The people who actually read the stuff say "That guy's far out!". But you're talking about maybe eight, ten or up to a dozen people, who have read the stuff. I've been weird all my life and I'll be weirder as I go along.

Dagon: On an entirely different subject, I understand you're a keen fan of the film director Sam Peckinpah and that you once came close to working with him on a film. For the *Wild Bunch* fans amongst *Dagon*'s readership can you fill us in with the details?

Wagner: I did a teleplay for *Tales From The Darkside* in the United States called "The Horror from the Mound" by Robert E. Howard. Kirby McCauley, who is also Stephen King's agent, was going to produce the thing for them. A friend of Kirby's was going to photograph it and a

couple of other friends of Kirby's went out to Cross Plains, Texas to get actual locales on it. Oliver Stone, known to some people as the guy who did *Platoon*, read the script, phoned me up and said "This is fucking brilliant". The people at *Tales From The Darkside's* Laurel Productions said "This is just a little bit over our heads even if you're putting up the money ... What we want to do is move this back to New Jersey instead of Texas & we'll shoot it with local indians instead of Mexicans". Kirby said "No thanks". So, Plan B: Kirby says to me "Do a screenplay for 'Cairn on the Headland' [a further Robert E. Howard story - ed] and we'll shoot it on locale in Ireland, along with 'The Horror from the Mound'. You do those two and Stephen King will do the third of the group, one of his choice" - I don't know which one Steve chose to do - "We'll put it together as a three part anthology for cable t.v. and we'll get Sam Peckinpah to direct the whole lot". So he went down to see Sam Peckinpah in Mexico, came back and said "It came off perfectly, Peckinpah liked the idea, we got on great. He's all keen for the project so we're gonna do it ... By the way Sam's not doing quite as much coke and booze as he used to, what's all these pills he had on his night table? What's nitroglycerin for?". I said "Kirby, that's for heart disease, you take that for the pains in your chest". He was dead a week later. We would have had an incredible project there. With L. Q. Jones, Strother Martin was still alive at the time, all these standard Peckinpah actors, Peckinpah directing the damned thing and Kirby producing it and two writers doing no holds barred stuff on location. It would have been a fantastic film. But next, Sam, you had to fucking die. I think Kirby feels worse about it than I do. But still, it would have been a swell film.

Dagon: Can you tell us a bit about the new book you are currently working on and give readers a few insights into its background?

Wagner: Basically, it's impossible to explain. The title of it's called *At First Just Ghostly*, which, again, is a rock music motif off of *A Whiter Shade of Pale* the first album that Procol Harem did. It's set in London, in August 1987, during the harmonic convergence. Your basic wasted American writer, who may bear some resemblance to me, comes over to England, totally out of his head, for the science fiction convention in Brighton. Little bekknown to this poor writer, he has stumbled upon the secrets of synchronicity, which he can't control - he's a magician unawares. Kane in the meantime has managed to shatter time and space and is wandering around London as a publisher (among other things) - I told you this was impossible to explain. The writer in question is named Cody Lennox, he's the son of Terry Lennox who's the guy from *The Long Goodbye* who betrays Marlowe, kills his wife and escapes to Mexico. Poor old Cody has got the power to control synchronicity, but he doesn't understand it. Kane can control time but not random events, so all Cody has to do is wish for something to happen and Kane has the power to make it happen. There's two forces: Kane, who is all the hope that earth has left against the powers of Satan, who is Kane's old buddy and sometimes adversary. The two of them are fighting for control. Satan plans to unleash the powers of hell and totally obliterate the earth - just for the hell of it. But that's Kane's old turf and Kane is back.

There's a conversation between Kane and Satan down in Russell Square tube station, which if you keep on going down the stairway, deeper and deeper, you'll find yourself in hell. Satan says "Stay out of this, Kane, we've been friends in the past". Kane says "It's my turf now. I don't like your plans for rennovation". Satan says "We can work a deal"

To which Kane replies "I've always loved you like a brother..." and pulls a laser. Essentially, it's a battle of evil against evil. Kane's pretty tough to bring down after all these years. Frankly, I wouldn't envy Satan's chances in all this.

Dagon: One of your most popular tales, "Beyond Any Measure" is also set in London. What dark attractions lurk for you in this city?

Wagner: Blow lamps, Tennants lager, Dave Carson's lewd friends...

Carson: Double headed dildos?

Wagner: Double headed dildos! I have more friends over here than I do in the States. No seriously, I've been coming over here for the past fifteen years and I think I've lived about two years in London of that time. It's an interesting city. You've got the pubs, and the off-licences, and let's see, then there's the pubs (laughter). The place has got a lot of atmosphere to it. There's a certain London walk you have, you walk along briskly with big strides and you don't look up or down because you know exactly where you are going, whether you want to go there or not. Whereas tourists kind of wander around, looking and gaping. This is a very creepy city, there's lots of dead people around here. There's this plague ground, with a little grassy green stuck on top, all full of people who have been dead from bubonic plague, small pox or whatever's been around at the time. There's a certain mysticism about London — what's the old bit, I think it was from Johnson who said "When a man grows tired of London, he grows tired of life". There are a lot of big cities, but I like this one best of all. I'd like to live here but they wouldn't let me. Someone would say "God, Wagner's been here for a month now. Quick! Somebody hit him on the head and put him on a plane out of here".

No, there's a certain atmosphere. You know, the Boris Karloff films, foggy streets, the Jack the Ripper stuff and all this in 1988! When you get into the feel of an area it starts to make sense to you. I know the back streets, the turnings, the secret place where you can still find the ... err ... double dil..

Carson: Double Diamond?

Wagner: The Double Diamond! I originally found the best pubs in town, and still know where they are. So I started thinking how can I keep the taxman from questioning my write-offs on this stuff? And thought, hell I'll write some stories set in London. That works, but actually London's the same to me to absorb vibrations from as Knoxville, Tennessee, the place I was born.

Dagon: Aside from living it up in London, and the writing, I hear you have further plans for Carcosa Books. Would you like to talk about the press, its past and future projects?

Wagner: I've done four books. Two of which won the World Fantasy Award for best collection of the year. Two are still in print — I have fifty copies of one lying around and about a hundred of the other.

Carson: So which books are available and how much can you get them for? So that we can send you big cheques.

Wagner: *Murgunstruum and Others* [by Hugh B. Cave] and *Far Lands, Other Days* [by E. Hoffman Price] but I don't have the time to send them to you because I'm trying to finish this great big novel I keep talking about (laughter). There are three people at Carcosa — no, there's one

person at Carcosa and two hangers on (laughter). And there are at least two more books of which I'm honour bound to bring out: a third collection of Manly Wade Wellman stories called *Don't Look Behind You* which has George Evans illustrations. Then there's a Hugh B. Cave collection called *Death Stalks The Night* which is illustrated by Lee Brown Coye, shortly before he died. We're thinking of doing a collection of Jean Ray stories which Ted Ball is translating, but what I'll have to do, when I have time, is find an agency who will print the books and send them to people who want to buy them. They'll only be about 1000 copy editions from now on, and I won't have to haul them into Dicker & Dunster. It's a hobby, at the moment we have fifty dollars in our bank account — fifteen years after we've been in existence. That's four books and fifty dollars to show for it, so I reckon they'll be a bit more expensive in future.

Dagon: On a lighter note, at the recent Worldcon in London, it was rumoured that you were masquerading as Clive Barker. Can you explain how this hilarious state of affairs came about?

Wagner: That was a signing at Forbidden Planet. I went down to it and the room was very crowded and hot & both claustrophobic and agrophobic. So I went out for a couple of sandwiches and came back when things had calmed down. I sat down next to Ramsey Campbell because there was an empty chair next to him. All of a sudden these television cameras start shining in my face and I thought "Hey, I didn't know I was that good". It turned out that Ramsey had been sitting next to Clive Barker and Clive had gone back to wherever he had come from. There were all these Clive Barker books on the other half of the table, next to Ramsey's, and these idiots must have figured: "Oh, Clive Barker, we've heard of his name, that must be him sitting right there". I was autographing books for the Forbidden Planet people and I noticed these lights on my face and cameras boring in. This technician comes in and says "Just pretend to be signing it — move your hand down the page, so we can get it in and pose for the camera". So I'm signing this book and I guess he couldn't see too well, so they kept on taking my picture.

Dagon: Finally, what plans lie ahead from your own pen and do you have any ambitions that lie unconquered?

Wagner: To live and die a rolling stone. I figure what I'll do is keep on going the way I'm going — write horror, die free. There's a lot of books I want to do. Keep on buying books that other people wrote, I'm going to keep reading those and collect them up in big stacks, which will probably one day topple over on me and you'll find Karl Wagner's arms sticking out beneath a pile of books which he hasn't written. But as long as I'm still alive Kane will keep popping up in things, still breaking taboos and breaking boundaries. I'm finally producing the characters that actually preceeded Kane, Kane actually started out as a gunfighter. I want to keep on doing *The Year's Best Horror*, and anthologies. Eventually I hope to go into films that's when Nastassia Kinski suddenly realises that there's no future for me, and she'll probably come knocking at the door, and we'll take it from there. Nastassia will say "Karl, you mad fool, I've been waiting for this for years". And I'll say "Wait, wait, wait, not without a jiffy!" To which she'll reply "That's alright I've eaten three this morning".

I think that's about as far as I can go on this. You can edit that to your heart's desire... Let's go get Angel!

Dagon: Why not?

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Judging the Insane

Writing and running *Call of Cthulhu* tournaments

by Mark Morrison

The concept of a roleplaying tournament is a bit mutant. By their nature, roleplaying games encourage co-operation among players rather than competitiveness. However, the base human drive to be better than the next person leads even roleplayers to joust in the field of mental superiority. More to the point, gaming conventions bring players together with manufacturers, retailers, designers, and (heavens!) each other, so it's fairly natural that they're going to want to play some. Different people play different games, and the most different of all are those that dare play *Call of Cthulhu*; it was inevitable that this nefarious population would go for a tournament after their own hearts (and I mean that most literally). The following essay is a rambling discourse on the writing, running and ruination of *Cthulhu* tournaments, and is drawn from the collected wisdom and experiences of an unholy brethren of Keepers bringing *Cthulhu* to the masses at games conventions in Melbourne, over the past few years. No, don't bother reaching for the atlas, I'll tell ya: Melbourne, Australia. This diatribe comes to you in the hope that it will interest those that have run similar events to hear how it's done in the Southern Hemisphere (or at least in a small corner of it), to illustrate how to tackle it for those who haven't given it a go, and to fill in those ghouls whose tombs are too distanced and lonely to allow social contact.

A few words first on Melbourne gaming conventions. There's not much in the way of games manufacturers in Australia (there are a couple, but this ain't the time or place to go into that), so Melbourne conventions have always been organised with the specific aim of getting together to play, as opposed to the more trade-fair orientation of major U.K. and U.S. cons. Mind you, our cons are much smaller affairs, attracting numbers in the vicinity of 200 - 500 players. Tournaments are offered in different systems, and vary in length and numbers of players: a major tournament spans three sessions, a minor one is romped through in a single session. Depending on the con, sessions are either 2 or 2½ hours duration. Players either enter as full teams, or enter individually and are lumped into same. Each team plays all sessions of an adventure (no godforsaken 'knock-out' abominations here!), and are scored each session for their competence in tackling the module and roleplaying. The first few teams for each tournament are then awarded varying degrees of loot for their efforts. Players generally enter as many tournaments that they can timetable themselves for.

The first *Cthulhu* tournament I ran came as a bit of a surprise - to me, that was. The event was Phantastacon 84, and I had mentioned to the blokes running it that I would run a few demo games of *Cthulhu* if anyone was interested - at that stage I had just discovered the game, and was keen to bring its dank clutch to others, but I didn't expect any great demand. I ambled into the convention at 11 on the first day

with a few notes under my arm, and was greeted with the news that I had three teams ready to play at midday. Hah! Realizing I may be out of my depth, I hastily shanghaied four friends (one had run *Cthulhu* before, two had only played, and for the other it was his first game!), ran them through it, went home, spent all night writing it out in English, photocopied it, flung it at the others next morning, and went back in that day with five brooding Keepers on deck ready to face all comers. It was wildly successful, and we've been doing it ever since.

We have in the tournaments which followed refined our philosophy and technique. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* remains the main event at all conventions here, and retains a true tournament (win! win! win!) mentality in most cases. *AD&D* teams are of 6 or 8 players, usually shouting over each other. The modules tend to emphasize combat and problem-solving, and in order to make sure everyone gets the same deal all script is prepared to be read at the players, and DMs rarely bend to let the players stray from the module's chosen path, and (because it's a tournament, gang) never help the players if they are floundering. The scoring system measures how far the team gets, with specific points for killing monster X or pulling lever Y. *D&D* tourneys have been getting better in recent years, but the situation by and large remains the same. I always disliked playing under such conditions — flailing away at a difficult module, bogging down with lengthy battles, player arguments, and rarely finishing the adventure because time runs out (sort of like putting a book down seven eighths of the way through — most frustrating). What I particularly detest is the way players and DM are in direct competition to each other, causing stupid rules disputes, etc. So, our methodology in running *Cthulhu* tournaments was shaped in direct opposition to the focus of the *AD&D* ones.

First up, the objective was to have fun. The scenarios had to be as exciting, scary, tension-packed and as entertaining as possible. By basing our scoring on general play style rather than specific achievement, Keepers were freed up to add or embellish scenes as they saw fit, so long as they basically stuck to the scenario for the convenience of those taking part in subsequent session(s)! Time elapsed plays no part in the scoring, so Keepers are able to pace it as they see fit, with only the real restraint of leaving enough time for a break before running their next team. Keeper intervention is encouraged to keep the game moving if the players are bogging down, rather than sitting and waiting for them to come up with a decision. This intervention ranges from the gentle introduction of extra evidence, to adding a conclusion the players may have missed via an *Idea* roll, right down to the large glowing hand which descends from the sky holding a sign saying THIS WAY FOLKS. (Such has been needed on occasion! Actually, my favourite example of outrageous Keeper manipulation was during a playtest, in which to proceed to the next stage it was necessary for each of the players to take a drug. One refused. In desperation the Keeper introduced two nuns who burst into the hotel room, tied her down, administered it, then ran out again. It was surprisingly logical at the time). The fact that the Keeper is working as much as the players to move things forward creates a more relaxed and friendly environment between them, so all can sit back and get on with the roleplaying. A further dictate is that all teams get to the finish of the scenario, so they at least know how it turns out in the end. Our plan is that players enter the *AD&D* to seriously compete, but play *Cthulhu* to have a bloody good time.

Teams have a different Keeper each session, so we get three opinions on each team's performance. I have over a dozen excellent Keepers on tap (some rarely play *Cthulhu* outside of conventions, some haven't even read the rules, but all are excellent roleplayers and gamemasters, which is more important in my book), and we generally manage 15-25 teams. Teams are of 4 players each, being about the maximum number (in my opinion) that you can still get a good scare into people, and the minimum number at which running a tournament for lots of people with only so many Keepers becomes logistically feasible. Teams are identified by name, and many compete time after time. stalwarts include: SAS; Degenerate Demigods; Penfold Fan Club; SPOD, and the Jack Burton Appreciation Society. My favourite team names: Old Man Whately Had A Farm, Eeeee! Augh! Eeeee! Augh! Eh! A Thousand Thousand Slimy Things; Legerdemain Vortex; and Dead On Arrival (actually, they're yet to show up, but it's a neat title).

One problem we always face is finding actual space to play at the venue. It's fine to lump a whole heap of screaming D&Ders in one loud overheated room with each other, but each *Cthulhu* team needs seclusion, so that a proper atmosphere can be built up, and so they're out of earshot of other players (overhearing something upcoming in a D&D adventure gives you a tactical advantage; in *Cthulhu*, it spoils the fun). At cons held on campuses we are able to find separate classrooms, but in hotels it can be trickier. Thus, tournament *Cthulhu* has been played in stairwells, basements, lofts, outside under the spreading dusk, in hotel bathrooms, corridors, store rooms, and stranger places; in truth, an odd environment adds to the atmosphere. Candles were standard equipment until one venue complained about the strange puddles of cooled wax left across the building (fair comment). Anywhere it's dark at a Melbourne con, you're liable to hear screams issuing from it. Most cons goers have learned to cope with this, and it helps the game's mystique no end ("Why are those people in there screaming?").

For scenario setting, we traditionally stick to the 20s, but we have made forays into the 50s, 60s, and early nineteenth century. The writing style tends to be sparse (although, hell, some of us do get carried away with prose), so that the tournament in print is more of an outline while the Keeper supplements with his or her memory of the playtest and own diabolical ideas. As for content, we tend to skirt brand-name Mythos, finding it convenient to invent our own beings when needed. This helps us to throw the players. We're also past masters of the art of vicious twist - players have been led to stop rituals that shouldn't be stopped, perform rituals that shouldn't be performed, they've been deliberately possessed (several times), they've discovered things about their own ancestry they rather they didn't, they've had dreams without knowing it, they've been dragged into dreamlands without wanting to go, they've been framed for crimes they didn't commit, and in some cases they've been deliberately driven mad and killed and then pulled from the illusionary wreckage. In short, we've given them the worst good time we can manage. As noted, Keepers toss in their own ideas as they go, and rarely resist telling the others gleefully of their little modifications and the effects they had, who will in turn deploy them, and by this cross-fertilisation the scenario will grow and evolve so that by the end of the convention it will run slightly differently to the way it started out.

We originally provided the players with set characters with set personalities, and compared their handling of those. However, we have discovered

that they roleplay better across-the-board with characters of their own devising, so we've taken to providing 4 sets of statistics (so that physically everyone is on the same footing). They decide for themselves the character's sex, background, etc. Generally we give each character a set of skills (although often we let them decide for themselves just what their profession is!), with points to divide among these, as well as skills of their own choosing (as per the usual method). Giving the players a small chance to shape the character tends to give them a better kick-off for playing it. Working with the same foundation, their ideas can be amazingly divergent; from a generic Artist framework, different players came up with: Art Historian (x2), Art Collector, Courier, Photojournalist, Conman, Photographer, Scholar/Croupier, Ambassador's Daughter, Artist/Writer, "Art Dealer" (Forger), Painter, National Geographic Photographer, Cartographer, Gambling Hall Owner, Artiste, Priest, Art Critic, Scientist/Inventor, and Journalist. Whew! An extra bonus of this is that the Keepers always sit down to a thoroughly different group, which brings a breath of variety into running the adventure for the nth time 'round.

Wading through this sea of idiosyncratic playing and Keeping to establish an actual winner is surprisingly simple. The scoring system looks at play style rather than specific actions, and is split between Individual Scores (for each player) and Team Scores. The categories for the individuals are *Characterisation* and *Consistency*. *Characterisation* is the player's ability to create and sustain an interesting, believable and logical character. *Consistency* relates to the actual time spent roleplaying — perfect roleplaying is faultlessly talking in the first person as one's character, but some players don't sustain this all the time (or at all). Teams are rated for *Decision Making*, *Genre Success*, and *Keeper Enjoyment*. *Decision Making* is the investigative ability of the team, as to whether they make the right moves and surprise the Keeper with their ingenuity, or need the odd prod (or steady flogging) to keep on the trail. *Genre* is their appreciation for the unwritten laws of horror roleplaying: getting scared, and working with the Keeper to create a spooky atmosphere, rather than hampering the Keeper with his or her creation of mood. *Success* (only applied in the final session) is simply a few bonus points if the players come through — save the world or whatever. *Keeper Enjoyment* is a purely subjective decision as to whether the Keeper had a good time, which is important to us, and indicative of whether or not it was a good game. This is the only area in which a team can score negative, if they were unpleasant to their Keeper (rather than the other way round).

In each case except the latter two, Keepers give their players a letter rating, corresponding as: (A) Excellent, (C) Good, (E) Poor, and (G) Non-existent. (B), (D) and (F) are the mid-ranges for each, if the Keeper feels that they are not quite that good but not quite that bad. Basically, (A) is first rate playing, flawless, constant; (C) is good, but with an occasional lapse, dropping out of character to discuss a problem, tossing in inappropriate jokes, etc.; (E) is generally bad, but with the occasional flash (almost as if the player was thinking, "Hey, time to grab some roleplaying points"); and (G) is just awful, with no input or inspiration.

Someone then takes the sheets and converts the letters to numbers, and tallies them up. The reason for this double-blind is that if Keepers are allowed to play with numbers, they tend to stuff around, giving ½ a point here because this player in the team was better than that one in

another, etc. — the effect is to make a whole lot of personal scoring methods rather than a unified one. Letters are a bit more inflexible (although some go into B++ or D-; just ignore 'em!).

Actual numerical values of each category vary; a rough mix could be 20 in each individual category (so, four players with scores for *Characterisation* and *Consistency* yields 160 points maximum per session), with 80 for *Decision Making*, 40 for *Genre*, 30 for *Keeper Enjoyment* and 30 for *Success* (final session only). This gives 150 points max each session for Team Score, but 480 for the three sessions combined — equivalent to the 480 for the Individual Scores over three sessions. Actual breakdown in each category must be decided, e.g. 20 points could be assigned as A 20, B 15, C 10, D 7½, E 5, F 2½, G 0. This sample range is weighted towards good players, but they deserve to be rewarded. More gradual increments could be deployed. For the odd categories, *Keeper Enjoyment* could be 30 (wow), 15 (good), 0 (okay), -60 (bad), with *Success* as 30 (unqualified success), 15 (success with help), 0 (failure — so much for Tokyo).

Get them all in, add 'em up, and you have your team placings. I should point out that we don't use exactly the same categories or points values each time, modifying to suit the tournament in question, or if we have a better idea. Some scenarios require new categories specific to them; for our 60s tournament, we split *Genre* into *Genre: Horror* and *Genre: 60s* (saying "Fab!").

If you've hit the players for an entry fee, they're going to expect to see some return in the way of prizes and trophies. We generally reward the top three teams (that's about as much as we can afford). The scoring system also provides a measure of the best individual roleplayers in the competition, if you wish to make a special award. A number of off-beat prizes spark player interest too, and help spread prizes among lower echelon teams. They don't have to be expensive, and in fact the odder the better. One tournament required each player to tell a story, so we awarded a copy of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the best. For our 60s musical tournament, we gave away old L.P.s to the top 15 roleplayers outside of the first 3 teams ("dirty secondhand records for great role-playing"), as well as a book of rock'n'roll dialect to the best presented group (Legerdmain Vortex), and a copy of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* to the most musical (the Innsmouth Coral Society, who gave us such heartwarmers as "Day-O, Day-ay-ay-O ... Dagon come, an' I wanna go home. Come Mr Shaman, summon me a Deep One, Dagon come, an' I wanna go home". Beautiful, eh?).

The way the points and prizes fall doesn't overly concern us though, and hopefully the players feel the same way; they ideally have had their time and money's worth in the mere playing of the thing. The system as it stands does stack the odds in favour of mature teams who know each other. Also, it rewards a specific style of play — but that's the one we promote, and players seem to enjoy it, so we're sticking with it.

That the players do have a good time is stamped on their faces. I have seen them leap back in horror; scream (genuinely); read a ritual in the dark with only five matches to use (they cheated, they lit the box); chant hoarsely twenty times; and look at each other in stunned disbelief. We had one person who played *Cthulhu* for the first time at one of our tournaments, was frightened stupid, and vows never ever to play again. Others come back each year. Perhaps our best example of player absorption: the Keeper was

running for a group of youngish players in a darkened room. The designer of the session stole softly in to listen, and by and by they all forgot he was there. When there was a sudden event, he thought he'd make it dramatic by suddenly stretching out his hands and screaming "Yaarrrrr!". Three of the players leapt out of their skins, but the fourth, on reflex, spun in the chair and landed a right hook that nearly decked the intruder! Now there's pathos.

The actual material remains to be discussed; the means of their destruction. The plots are usually fairly linear, as these are easier to run and take less words to explain. As per usual, clue-following trails link strong scenes of horror — heads flying through restaurant windows, zombies walking backwards in the moonlight, black things sitting on the wings of aircraft, a high chapel full of slowly falling black drapes — that sort of stuff. What is especially liberating about writing for a tournament is that it is a one-off scenario, so you can do whatever you like with the characters in shaping their prior life and future destiny. You needn't stay your hand out of compassion that it's a four years' running character. You can cheerfully put them through the grinder and watch them squirm.

Most of our efforts take three sessions to unfold. We like to have a different writer on each session, which gives each its own unique flavour and challenges. Often each part is set in a different geographical location. We start by thrashing out a basic plot together, divide it up, and meet in a month to playtest through the results. After some continuity editing, we're ready to bring the Keepers in. Our print-runs of the finished result are usually just enough to cover the Keepers and a few interested ghouls; this keeps us free from licensing hassles, and means we don't have to bust a gut to get the thing absolutely perfect presentation-wise.

Following is a summary of the tournaments which our *Cthulhu* collective has hit the masses with, including title, authors, convention, number of sessions, and brief notes on the plot. Phantastacon and Games [Year] are the major Melbourne cons (the latter replaced the former), run at Easter. Arcanacon is the Melbourne University club convention, which has outlasted the club itself, and is my favourite of the two — a bit more laid back and enjoyable. It was traditionally run between second and third term, around September, although now that the uni and school holidays are out of sync it is settling on July. Cauldracon and Pentacon were smaller affairs, in June and January respectively. The former was played at a church hall, and had many excellent and genuinely spooky nooks and crannies. So, in chronological order:

The Crack'd and Crook'd Manse

Morrison, Phantastacon 84, 1 Session

The grand old prototype. The investigators go out to the New England estate of an eccentric explorer who hadn't been seen recently... This one was complete with a storm, an axe-wielding stranger, a withered corpse, and all those other classic trappings. The conclusion brings the house down.

[This scenario was reprinted in *Multiverse 3*, an Australian gaming 'zine].

Plague Dogs

Coleman, Arcanacon II, 2 Sessions

A Dracula-style visitation to a quiet fishing village proves to be something else entirely. Players work against an unseen foe and an unknown

time limit. The first half features the infamous explosive little old lady. Climaxes in something stepping over the horizon which has even Crowley running.

The Bride of Abhoth

Routt, Phantastacon 85, 2 Sessions

The start of Liam Routt's Abhoth cycle. Four women gather together at the invitation of a man they had each had a relationship with at separate times. They arrive at his strange and lonely house on Rhode Island, only to find him indisposed and terror in the air. Creeping horror and insane jealousy ("This is all *your* fault! You never loved him!") in roughly equal screaming portions.

Black as Coal

Coleman, Cauldracon 85, 1 Session

A classic rollercoaster-ride-to-hell sort of scenario, in which the players are hired by a mining company to look into the apparent disappearance of a mineful of workers near Devil's Lake. A claustrophobic dead-hands-clawing-for-the-throat conclusion in the dark is enough to strip nerve ends as the players scramble for the dynamite. [This recently appeared in *Breakout* 27].

The Dark Continent

Coleman, Arcanacon III, 2 Sessions

A plane piloted by the dashing Louisiana Smith is ripped out of the sky over deepest darkest Africa. An unlikely assortment of characters (bearing with them a catatonic priest and a senile prof) have to struggle through the wilds, only to find the salvation of a jungle village worse peril than the bush... native politics, primitive ceremonies, and a finish under a mountain which threatens to come down.

[Printed in *The Devil's Advocate* Vol. 2 No. 1]

Haitian Horror

Routts & Morrison, Phantastacon 86, 2 Sessions

The second Abhoth module. The Schultz Investigation Bureau (Schultz, Schultz, Schultz and Schultz) are hired by one of the original four women to locate a mysterious round stone on Haiti. They do, along with death, zombies, exorcism, voodoo, and some really good rum joints.

Better Dead

Holsworth, Cauldracon 86, 1 Session

McCarthy's 50s, and the investigators are in the military, and assigned as defence counsel for a semi-insane G.I. who has wandered out of a Top Secret base with a corpse in his arms. Down at the base, everyone is permanently out to lunch. Some things are better left unsaid, some books are better left unread, and sometimes it's better to be dead... than red. Proof that even in a Sherman tank you aren't safe from Them.

His Master's Voice

Routts, Cooper & Morrison, Arcanacon IV, 3 Sessions

The swinging 60s, and each team created their own musical group - we had 'em all, folk, acid rock, classical, choral (or coral, as it was), and so on. A gig at the Paris Opera blackens their name and sends them down a long and winding road of madness, depression and possession, and along the way they swap licks with Erik, Erich, the Beatles, some very odd dreamers, and something fairly unspeakable. Set in Paris, London, and the Alps. Gothic and groovy.

Abhoth Omnipotens

Caleo, Routts & Love, Games 87, 3 Sessions

The third and apocalyptically final of the Abhoth series. The Schultzes go to Japan to wrest a plant from the strange tobacco smoking Black Samurai for that crazy lady on Rhode Island. Returning with it, she needs their aid in using it in conjunction with the Haitian stone to drive out a great evil. Unfortunately that evil is still kicking, and after the most surreal escape ever run, they make their way to Venice for an occult festival, wondering how to save the world as the clock draws to midnight and the populace wail in the streets. The rats!

In Memory Yet Green

Morrison, Waters & Anderson², Arcanacon V, 3 Sessions

A happy dinner party sets four strangers on a mad chase for four very striking archaeological artifacts with a lethal track record. Their search takes them to the back of Dunwich and beyond, but once having found the pieces their journey has just begun. They set sail to deal with something they have little idea about, and on the way have the worst Mediterranean crossing on record, as far as bodies on deck and bad craziness go. At Crete they trek to Knossos to their surprising destiny. One of the few tournaments with a truly "happy" ending.

Who Mourns For Adonis?

Holsworth, Pentacon 88, 1 Session

Byron, Shelley, Godwin and Polidori take a picnic to a half-ruined castle on an island on Lake Geneva. Exploring, they find decay, dreams, nightmares and madness. Created before *Gothic* was released, and easily outweirds it. A strange finish as the players find their own end to this odd tale.

Untimely Ripped

Keast, Waters & Anderson³, Games 88, 3 Sessions

A Whirlwind ride of confusion and disaster, spanning three genres of *Call of Cthulhu*, a true sense of wonder and real horror, tinged with perhaps a little sentimentality, and the hopelessness of inevitability ... more I cannot say.

There it is, insubstantial snippets of stuff you'll never play; but the purpose was to give an idea of the range we've covered in the tournament format.

That brings me to the end of this account of the exploits and excesses of a pack of feral Melbournean Keepers. I should point out that although I'm the one scrawling this out, the tournaments themselves were written, run, organised and presented by the whole gang; as per usual, they know who they are. Hopefully this is all of interest or dark inspiration to those who tread the same public path; I would be more than interested in hearing of others' endeavours in the field, my address can be found somewhere in these pages (look for Australian Ghoul or some such subscription details).

Crawl back to your crypts then, and remember to always keep the players in the dark

finish



ANCIENT IMAGES

RAMSEY CAMPBELL. Published by Legend, a division of Century Hutchinson Ltd., UK. 1989. 299 pp Hardback. £12.95. Review by Carl T. Ford.

Ramsey Campbell's latest chiller begins with an invitation by Graham Nolan to two of his closest friends; Sandy Allan, a fellow film editor at Metropolitan Television and his male lover Toby, to witness a rare screening of a lost horror film entitled *Tower of Fear*, which starred Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. However, when Sandy arrives she is alarmed to discover the flat wrecked and both the film and Graham missing. As she searches the apartment she glimpses a figure atop a neighbouring roof. It is Graham and as Sandy watches in terror the figure plummets the ten storeys to his death.

It transpires that Graham had in fact unearthed the only copy of *Tower of Fear* known to exist. The movie had never been granted a general release and is so rare as to be considered mythical by the majority of film students. When *The Daily Friend* newspaper runs an article by Leonard Stillwell announcing the death of Nolan and proclaiming *Tower of Fear* "a fictitious film", Sandy sets out to prove Graham right and reclaim the lost movie herself.

The search leads Sandy to an address book in which Graham had listed all those surviving members of the original cast and film crew. But as the investigations begin a sinister web of mystery surrounding the film and the strange deaths involving all those connected with it, cause reluctance for those surviving members of the production to talk about their work. It would seem that the entire movie was in some way cursed with something evil.

As the story progresses we learn that the film's director, Giles Spence, incorporated themes and images from authentic history surrounding the quaint countryside village of Redfield—now a community famous for its land produce. Spence died shortly after completion of his movie and both his death and the subsequent fates which befell other members of the crew seem to be connected with some dark image from Redfield's past history.

Campbell's skilfull observations of country life leave a convincing portrait of the day to day happenings in a rural village and the resentful attitudes of its inhabitants towards the commercialisation and industrial advances of the 20th century. Ramsey's haunting visuals are very reminiscent of those utilised by the master of the Gothic ghost story, M. R. James. Campbell presents us with a very convincing horror which pervades the text; a monstrous figure is glimpsed throughout the novel which resembles a dog-like entity crawling on all fours. One scene in particular, where the beast is witnessed crawling through a

field, is very similar to an episode in M. R. James's "The Mezzotint".

Campbell's use of foreshadowing in this novel is at its heaviest. The dog-like entity is personified on several occasions. Ramsey's protagonist continually imagines herself pursued by strange animals. A walk in the park unleashes sinister movements in the undergrowth, which Sandy dismisses as those of some pet at play or perhaps a tramp. (It should be noted that tramps are often portrayed as menacing figures in Campbell's fiction. The author's short story "Mackintosh Willy" related the strange circumstances surrounding the ghostly return of a murdered down and out). Another scene has Sandy driving her car on the Birmingham ringroad which is likened to "a race track with her playing the mechanical hare". Indeed, Campbell's protagonist is just that: A wild and unwitting hare being pursued by a hungry hound (like) entity. Later a Redfield villager calls her a "scared rabbit" further endorsing her role as the hunted prey.

The novel's plot centres to a large degree on Redfield's ancient pagan sacrifices to the land in the belief that the crops will prosper. When the bodies of the dead return to the soil they are reunited as one with the earth, eventually returning in the form of fresh crops come the new harvest. This backdrop to the novel is emphasised by further foreshadowing as numerous scenes involve Sandy imagining life forms springing forth from shrubs, bushes, trees and the like. Perhaps the book's best example of this is Campbell's inclusion of a sinister scarecrow figure which stalks Sandy Allan throughout the story (once more a variation on the dog/tramp theme). The scarecrow exemplifies the obvious link between man and the land, with its body composed of straw, wood and vegetation in the guise of a human. It is this trampish figure which provides the novel with some of its eeriest moments. Especially haunting is the scene where Sandy gazes out from her bedroom window at night and imagines the figure of the scarecrow leering up at her from the garden. Further examples of Ramsey enhancing the tale's pagan life cycle theme can be found throughout the text and following the protagonist's mother's suggestion that their lives are constantly surrounded by death, Sandy awakens in the dim twilight world between dream and reality to imagine herself surrounded "not by death but by flowers".

Another sinister image used in the novel is the tall dark tower of Redfield (which Sandy discovers formed the basis for director Spence's film). The structure stands tall and slim — an imposing figure of evil on the country landscape — like the scarecrow, and personified numerous times by Ramsey in various forms of foreshadowing. Perhaps the novel's most powerful scene is one where the investigator finds herself pursued up the black steps of the tower by an unseen entity. Pursual is always a strong element of Campbell's writing style and the author handles this scene most admirably, leaving the reader with a very definite sense of unease.

Campbell's love for movies is incorporated to a rather large degree in *Ancient Images*. Aside from the novel's storyline revolving around the search for a legendary horror film, numerous scenes in the book have their basis from the author's own experiences with the film genre. One chapter ridicules aspects of the amateur fan presses devoted to low budget sleaze movies (and at the same time manages to send-up one of the author's fellow writers — I'll let readers make up their own minds as to who this writer is). Ramsey's love for horror films is reflected in several incidents. The novel's opening chapter serves as a prelude

to events surrounding the mystery of Redfield's dark history and echoes the opening scene from Michael Reeves' 1968 movie, *Witchfinder General*. The film begins with the hanging of a woman accused of witchcraft by an angry band of villagers. In Campbell's opener a woman is burnt at the stake by a mob of Redfield townsfolk. In both scenes the victim gazes up whilst on the throes of death to look upon the face of her accuser. In the Reeves film the woman's tormentor sits atop his tall white steed upon a hilltop, his evil glare looking down upon the execution, whilst *Ancient Images*' victim stares "at the man who had judged her, gazing down impassively from his tower". Interestingly the novel shares another parallel with the same movie. The director of *Witchfinder General* like Campbell's Giles Spence died in dubious circumstances. Ramsey has admitted that the Michael Reeves film is amongst his favourite genre entries, so perhaps it is more than just coincidence that the two works share similarities.

Another movie which shares corresponding themes with Campbell's book is Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (British Lion, 1973). Hardy's film chronicles the search for a missing girl upon Summerisle, a Scottish isle which, like Redfield, is given to the worship of pagan gods. *The Wicker Man*'s sacrificial ceremonies and imagery resemble many of the elements found in Campbell's novel. "The Wicker Man" itself can be seen as Campbell's imposing "Tower of Redfield" both which stand as huge and menacing structures on the landscape. The inhabitants of Summerisle, like those villagers of Redfield are resentful of outside interference and Hardy's film also has its own "Green Man" public house to rival Ramsey's "Staff o' Life" inn. Lord Summerisle (portrayed in *The Wicker Man* by Christopher Lee) has a peer in the likes of Lord Redfield and several scenes from the film are echoed in Campbell's book, including an eerie search for clues in an ancient churchyard and a tour of the Lord's estate.

Despite the similarities *Ancient Images* is wholly original in its style and pacing which, again, run very much like a film, following the author's skills developed from an appreciation of the movies of Hitchcock & Resnais. Campbell continues to weave his own, personal, thoughts on society into his work in a most literate and entertaining manner without forcing his views down the reader's throat.

With the publication of *Ancient Images* Ramsey Campbell confirms his position as Britain's number one pioneer for securing a place for the modern horror novel amongst the classics of English literature.

THE HORROR IN THE MUSEUM AND OTHER REVISIONS

H. P. LOVECRAFT. Published by Arkham House Publishers Inc., Sauk City, Wisconsin, USA. 1989. 450 pp Hardback. \$18.95. Review by Carl T. Ford.

The final volume in S. T. Joshi's four brilliant critical editions collecting the definitive versions of Lovecraft's fiction is, textually the most welcome. Students will, no doubt, be delighted to discover the inclusion of five tales which, until now, have proved difficult to encounter outside small press works. These five tales are listed under the category 'Secondary Revisions'. Perhaps the most important of these new additions is "The Trap", a collaboration with Henry S. Whitehead in the early 1930s, for which Lovecraft reported writing the entire central section of the story. The tale is most Lovecraftian in its theme. Written before both "The Dreams in the Witch House" and

"Through the Gates of the Silver Key". Here Lovecraft's protagonist enters a strange world through the use of an old mirror, the tale also features a Joseph Curwen/Ephraim Waite type in the likes of a character called Axel Holm. "The Tree on the Hill" originally appeared in the September 1940 edition of *Polaris*, a small-press mimeograph, where it was published under the name of Duane W. Rimel, who wrote the initial version. Lovecraft received the draft prior to its publication and revised several paragraphs, completely writing the third and final section himself, and supplying the quoted passage from the *Chronicle of Nath*. Whilst the outline is certainly Rimel's, a nod to Lovecraft's style and philosophy are evident. The opening chapter with its geographical description of the Hampdon region is reminiscent of Lovecraft's Arkham country described in "The Colour out of Space" and "The Durwich Horror". A prototype for the 'Shining Trapezohedron' from HPL's "The Haunter of the Dark" can be seen in the guise of an "old Gem" and a reference to "The Year of the Goat" is a reference to Shub-Niggurath. "The Tree on the Hill" is a subtle piece with many allusions to Lovecraft's mythos which works much better than some of the longer revisions found in *The Horror in the Museum* which border on self-parody.

A second new Rimel revision "The Disinterment" appears to bear very little of Lovecraft's pen, according to Joshi, and shows the extent to which Rimel would go to emulate Lovecraft's style. The tale tells of a man who, afflicted with leprosy, attempts to avoid deportation by taking an experimental drug which gives the recipient the appearance of death. The man is buried and disinterred, but upon regaining consciousness finds he is paralyzed and unable to move until the drug has completely worn off. The ending of the tale has the narrator return to his ancestral home in typically Lovecraftian fashion and it is, perhaps, this final section of the tale that Lovecraft had the most involvement.

"Ashes" was the first of Lovecraft's revisions for his friend C. M. Eddy, Jr. (whose superior efforts, most notably "The Loved Dead", "The Ghost-Eater", and "Deaf, Dumb and Blind" are also collected). Briefly, "Ashes" tells the tale of Malcolm Bruce's trial period as laboratory assistant to Professor Van Allister who has discovered a means to reduce matter to a powdered compound. Anything coming into contact with this chemical reverts to 'ashes'. Following successful experiments on animals, the evil professor decides to use a human being as his guinea pig. The story is most unLovecraftian in its depiction of characterisation - the protagonist finds himself falling in love with a girl and the ending of the tale is very melodramatic. I suspect that the reason this tale has only recently surfaced (see *Crypt of Cthulhu, Ashes and Others*, 1982) is not for lack of research by scholars, but due, possibly, to those in the know wishing to not embarrass Lovecraft.

The fifth new entry is, to my mind, the best tale in the collection, revised extensively for Robert H. Barlow "The Night Ocean" stands as a beautiful piece of prose which examines one man's fascination for the mysteries of the sea. The story is more than welcome in this collection.

Whilst the inclusion of these five new tales, one might consider the book a worthy addition to their Lovecraftian library, should they own copies of the original 1970 edition, but there are further reasons to obtain this revised volume. Both "Medusa's Coil" and "The Mound" were edited extensively by Derleth prior to their inclusion in *Weird Tales* under Zealia Bishop's name. A third Bishop revision, "The Curse of Yig",

is almost pure Lovecraft, for which he has admitted "All the plot and motivation... are my own - I invented the snake-god, the curse, the prologue and epilogue, the point about the identity of the corpse, and the monstrously suggestive aftermath" (see *Selected Letters*, vol. III, pp 29-30). It is the revisions for Zealia Bishop that supply some of the best examples of horror in this collection, due to HPL's extensive ghost writing.

Readers scanning the contents page will quickly notice two other changes from the original 1970 edition. "The Horror at Martin's Beach" a secondary revision for Sonia H. Greene replaces the title for "The Invisible Monster" (the editor at *Weird Tales* supplied the latter title prior to publication). Another Greene tale originally included has now been dropped since Sonia has admitted that Lovecraft did not alter the text and was written only upon her husband's suggestion.

Lovecraftians owning a copy of the 1970 edition are advised to loan or give it to a friend, before rushing out and securing the new Joshi edited volume.

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY BOOK REVIEW ANNUAL 1988

ROBERT A COLLINS & ROBERT LATHAM, eds. Published by Meckler Ltd, Grosvenor Gardens House, Grosvenor Gardens, London. 1989. 500 pp Hardback. £42.00

For readers rich enough to fork out the 42 sovs, this book will supply the definitive guide to all genre entries published during 1987. Every major science fiction, fantasy and horror tome I could think of receives a review from a number of readers who know their stuff. Aside from an introduction by the editors the book boasts several interesting chapters. Orson Scott Card is named "Author of the Year" and receives a 10 page essay on his work and influences by Mark L. Van Name. Leading critic of the fantasy field, Charles de Lint surveys "The Year in Fantasy, 1987" and voices his opinions on trends, publishing directions, genre debuts, and the speciality presses. Surprisingly Clive Barker's *Weaveworld* heads de Lint's recommended reading list for novels and the author's editorial skills on Dark Harvest's *Night Visions IV* collection also impressed this reviewer somewhat, since this title heads the recommended listing for anthologies & collections.

"The Year in Horror, 1987" by Michael A. Morrison is a well observed critical analysis and subjects covered include Major Novels - And The Issues They Raise, with insights into the works of McCammon, Barker, James Herbert, O'Neill, Kin, Campbell and Lansdale. A look at Genre Staples, Horror Sub- and Cross-Genres, Short Fiction, Small Press magazines (in which *Dagon* gets a warm mention) and a Conclusion. Alan Moore's *Watchmen* graphic novel is number one on Morrison's recommended horror novels listing, Richard Christian Matheson gets top spot for *Scars* and *Other Distinguishing Marks* on the anthologies list, and Douglas E. Winter's "Splatter: A Cautionary Tale" is singled out as best short fiction. I was pleased to see two tales by Thomas Ligotti in the selected reading list, "Vastarian" and "Dr. Locrian's Asylum".

Science Fiction is covered by Michael M. Levy who takes a look at the works of David Brin, Benford, Shepard, Bishop, Koman and Effinger and several others. Hard SF and Cyberpunk receive analysis as does the voice of feminism, Sequels, Debuts and Short Fiction. Neal Barrett Jr. reaches number one on the novels for *Through Darkest America*.

A listing of the major award winners of 1987 is followed by the review section itself, a three hundred page section divided into three headings: Fiction, Young Adult Fiction & Non-fiction. The reviews offer some splendid critical remarks from all areas of publishing. Amongst the best are those supplied by Stefan Dziemianowicz, Michael A. Morrison, and Brian Stepelford. The reviews are listed alphabetically by author which makes quick reference simple.

The book is rounded off with a Title Index listing all story, book and magazine titles mentioned in the annual, once more enabling the work easy for the reader searching for specific information. At £42, the book is rather expensive but remains an essential mine of reference for the dedicated bibliographer.

THE STYGIAN DREAMHOUSE

MARK F. SAMUELS, editor. Published by Mark F. Samuels, 55 Brasted Close, Peak, Hill, Sydenham, London SE26 4LT. A5 format, 36pp. £1.25. Review by Carl T. Ford.

Mark Samuels first effort in small press publishing is a fairly good attempt which benefits enormously from having contributors such as D. F. Lewis and Peter F. Jeffery, who supply the magazine with some fine fiction.

In the editorial Mark stresses that his aims are to provide readers with dark unadulterated horror/fantasy fiction "from the dreamlike subtlety of Lord Dunsany to the insidious psychological disturbances of Robert Aickman", if the editor wishes to retain the quality of writing as expressed in the fiction of these talented writers I feel he'll have to be far tougher with his editing, which seems pretty light in places in this magazine, a fault which is repeated in a large number of small press magazines available today.

Mark opens the magazine with his own "Metempsychosis" which, whilst bearing signs of a worthwhile plot lacks the advantages of balanced grammar. Not wishing to be too harsh, I feel the story could have been far more effective if the author would have sat down after having written the piece and gone through it carefully with an eye for constructing a more literate flow to the language, a device that an experienced editor would employ naturally.

"Connections" by D. F. Lewis benefits from the author's developed skill at writing a prose style which is entirely suited to its subject. Lewis's warped sense of humour serves his macabre plot perfectly and the prose is beautifully conveyed.... "The garden path had led me, between rows of bending sunflowers, towards the double doors and, when approaching them from that distance and direction, they seemed like the open covers of a black book, its narrow spine pointing right out at me... but I could not read the title, until I arrived close up and discovered it was not a title at all, but the glimmering of a candleflame being carried up the long winding stairs to the first landing, and it disappeared as soon as I recognised it". The tale itself, a short prose poem, tells of a man's fascination for an old Georgian house, and the disturbances which follow upon entering inside. I would imagine the piece was probably written specifically for the *Dreamhouse* and this issue is very rich for its inclusion.

Simon Clark supplies the third piece of fiction in the magazine. "Howls from a Blinding Curve" chronicles the misfortune that befalls a rock band

when they pen a Henrix-styled song, bearing some sinister allusions to their idol. The tale is a convincing effort that benefits from the use of some wild and authentic dialogue between the protagonists.

"The Dirty Picture" by Peter F. Jeffery carries the author's distinct style of utilising the blackest humour he can dream up and combining it with off-beat horror. A charming tale of a police inspector's strange experiences with the paranormal.

The Stygian Dreamhouse #1 is rounded off with "Before God" a tale by the editor's brother, Steven Samuels, which relates the events which surround the disappearance of two young girls in the strange hamlet called "Neatonbury".

With some disturbing artwork by Desmond Knight, which unfortunately is rather poorly reproduced, the package is worth obtaining with the promise of room for improvement for the future. If the editor can build on the few faults of this premier edition, *The Stygian Dreamhouse* will find itself amongst the leading contenders of Britain's fantasy small press magazines.

LOVECRAFT STUDIES #18

S. T. JOSHI, editor. Published by Necronomicon Press, Spring 1989. 32pp. Copies available from Dagon Press, 11 Warwick Road, Twickenham, Middx TW2 6SW. £3.50. Review by Carl T. Ford.

The latest issue of Joshi's Lovecraft bible contains several thought provoking essays of which "Lovecraft and James Joyce" by Norman L. Gayford is the most informative. For those unfamiliar with the work of Joyce, the writer's most famous piece was the novel *Ulysses* a tale containing Gothic imagery and motifs which Lovecraft frequently utilised in his own fiction. Here Gayford offers some amazing parallels with the work of the two authors. Comparing *Ulysses* with HPL's "Dagon" and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" in their use of sea gods, neo-Gothic atmospherics, and Biblical Revelation. Some very interesting observations are made which leads one to ponder whether Lovecraft had actually read Joyce's work and not merely glanced at "extracts" as reported to J. Vernon Shea in a letter dated February 1932.

Robert M. Price supplies "Robert E. Howard and the Cthulhu Mythos" an essay which examines Howard's use of Lovecraft's mythos in his own work. Surprisingly, Howard showed a good grasp of the fundamentals of Lovecraft's philosophy regarding the role of man in the cosmos. "Dig Me No Grave", "The Black Stone", "The Children of the Night", "The Thing on the Roof" and "The Fire of Asshurbanipal" display little imitation of the work of Lovecraft, yet Howard manages to build up a convincing Mythos of his own which rings true to the visions presented to us in the likes of Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness", "The Dunwich Horror", "The Call of Cthulhu" etc. Robert Price examines Howard's *Nameless Cults*, a tome which featured regularly in the playful borrowing of Mythos tomes, place names and deities between the two authors and shows how accurately the two authors depicted the book in their separate stories.

"Swan Songs: Lovecraft and Yeats" by Donald R. Burleson is one of those Lovecraft analyses which is too clever for its own good, and is of interest to only the most fervent of Lovecraft scholars.

"The Last of H. P. Lovecraft" by J. B. Michel is a short essay recounting the author's friendship with Donald A. Wollheim and their visit to Lovecraft's home at 66 College Street, Providence, shortly after HPL's death. Their meeting with Lovecraft's aunt, Annie Gamwell, and perusal of Howard's personal effects is quite touching. This article originally appeared in *The Science Fiction Fan* #39, November 1939, and so I doubt many readers would have seen the piece before, making this reprint a very worthwhile inclusion.

#18 is rounded off with the reviews section which takes an in-depth look at Peter Cannon's *H. P. Lovecraft*, (Twayne Publishers), and the revived letter column.

THE HAUNTED PALACE

Produced and Directed by Roger Corman. Screenplay by Charles Beaumont. Starring Vincent Price, Debra Paget, Lon Chaney Jr., Frank Maxwell, Leo Gordon, Elisha Cook Jr., John Dierkes, Barboura Morris, Bruno Ve Sota. 1963. USA. 85 minutes. Virgin Video. £9.99. *Review by Kim Neuman.*

The rise of sell-through video as an arm of film distribution means that all manner of older and more obscure movies are creeping back into the marketplace at a little less than the price of a hardback book. Although trailed on the box and in the credits as an Edgar Allan Poe adaptation (incredibly, Poe's name is misspelled on the film), this was actually the first attempt to transfer the work of H. P. Lovecraft to the screen. By 1963 the popularity of the series of Vincent Price/Edgar Allan Poe movies that had begun three years earlier with *The House of Usher* was beginning to become a problem for their creator, Roger Corman. The only way he had been able to turn Poe's narrative poem "The Raven" into a film was by setting it up as a burlesque of the whole cycle, and when American International handed him Poe's descriptive poem "The Haunted Palace" he was forced to seek other source material. So, almost by accident, Lovecraft made his movie debut. Later, Corman claimed that screenwriter Charles Beaumont (himself an accomplished writer of short fiction) and he had attempted to transpose the plot of the Lovecraft story into the universe of Poe.

This opens with a spider spinning a web under the credits and catching a butterfly while Ronald Stein's terrific, overorchestrated score thunders ominously. Then it's Arkham, Massachusetts, in the middle of the 18th Century, and the locals in the tavern - character players Leo Gordon, Elisha Cook Jr. and John Dierkes - are strutting in three-cornered hats and knee-britches while muttering about the bad habits of Joseph Curwen (Price), the local warlock, to whose palace overlooking the village various young girls have been lured for a spot of mating with the unspeakable extradimensional deity locked in the cellars. Gordon is miffed because Curwen has nabbed his girlfriend (Cathy Merchant) and made her his mistress, and so he is especially enthusiastic when a mob is formed to drag Curwen down to a tree and burn him alive. Before he goes, Curwen has time to make a speech cursing everyone present to the third generation.

Then, we cut to one hundred and ten years later, when Gordon, Cook and Dierkes have changed their clothes to 19th Century gear and are pretending to be their own great-grandsons. Charles Dexter Ward (Price again), Curwen's great-grandson, arrives at Arkham with his dim wife Ann (Paget) to move into the palace he has just inherited. "Well, it looks cursed, I'll give it that" he quips looking around the mist-shrouded main street and observing the extras with splodges of goo over their faces to represent hideous

mutations caused by Curwen's interracial breeding experiments. When he sets up shop in the cliff-top palace, he is fascinated to observe a 17th Century painting in the style of a lesser *Weird Tales* illustration that demonstrates how much he looks like his ancestor, and singularly fails to be suspicious when Lon Chaney shambles green-faced out of the shadows claiming to be the caretaker. Soon, the weak-willed Ward is being possessed by his ancestor, and the locals are mumbling in the inn — renamed *The Burning Man* — about reviving the local witch-burning traditions.

Although it has a more complicated plot than most of the Corman/Poe movies, *The Haunted Palace* is surprisingly uneventful. The whole central section seems to consist of Price brooding in the palace — which has been transported stone by stone from Italy, where "Torquemada had many happy hours" torturing people in it — and Paget creeping around corridors by night. Fun as this is, it really doesn't play that well on video — especially thanks to some dodgy duplication that adds a special relevance to lines like "one gets accustomed to the darkness here" — and ought to be seen in its original Panavision format. All Corman's baroque gothics depend on their widescreen gloom and atmospheric looks. In this he was especially well served throughout the series by photographer Floyd Crosby and art director Daniel Haller. Haller contributes several impressively cavernous interiors for the Curwen Palace, notably a huge staircase, and was obviously taken with the source material, for he went on to direct the next two Lovecraft movies, *Die, Monster, Die!* (from "The Colour Out of Space") and *The Dunwich Horror*.

Price enjoys himself in all these movies, and here relishes the melodrama without camping it up too much with lines like "I will not have had my fill of revenge until this village is a graveyard". But the filmmakers couldn't really embrace the cosmic purposes of Lovecraft's Curwen, and so — despite a cameo appearance by the *Necronomicon* and name-checks for Cthulhu and Yog-Sothoth — this really does feel more like a Poe movie. Curwen's main motivations are slobbering lust for his long-dead mistress — or Ward's wife if the former can't be resurrected — and a desire for revenge on his persecutors (see also *Witchcraft*, *Mark of the Witch*, *Necropolis*, *Superstition* and hundreds of other killing-the-descendents-of-the-peasants-who-burned-the-witch movies), and his major task of bringing the Great Old Ones back from the void so they can take over the universe barely gets mentioned. As in all the other films in the series, it ends with Price's mansion catching fire — cue footage lifted from *The House of Usher* and featured in every single entry in the cycle — and the whole rotten structure falling down while Poe gets quoted over the end titles. Unusually, Ward gets dragged out of the holocaust, but it is strongly suggested that Curwen has entirely usurped his descendent's body, making this historically important as one of the first horror movies with a genuinely unhappy ending.

MORE LOVECRAFT IN THE COMICS

James Van Hise has kindly sent me a copy of *The Real Ghostbusters* #8 which features an adventure entitled "Toad Island". The Ghostbusters team investigate a strange sect of Deep Ones, led by 'Nogad' (read that backwards) whose ghastly funfair attractions including "Pickman's Model" and the "Tunnel of Lovecraft" house sinister activity. A horde of Deep Ones and an appearance by Cthulhu himself make the comic book an interesting buy. The tale is written by James himself and drawn by John Tobias. (Published by Now Comics, USA, April 1988).

Black Mail

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Mark F. Samuels, Sydenham, London. You'll be fed up by now with people saying this... but what a shame Dave Carson didn't complete the comic strip started on page 8! However, I wonder what the "Old Gent" would have made of Randy M. Wadkins' article "Lovecraft in the Comic Books"? He'd have probably choked at the sight of "The Shadow out of Time" reduced to such a format, but this isn't the case with me. Having seen the two *Skull* comics I can vouch for their wonderfulness - & artistic integrity. On the point of Richard Corben's startling adaptation of "The Rats in the Walls", Corben didn't confine himself to HPL. There is a brilliant & sinisterly gothic Poe "special", with a "House of Usher" that would have even the slightest comic book fan reeling in abject admiration.

Stephen Sennitt, Mexborough. Many thanks for *Dagon* #24. As regards Randy Wadkins' comics article, readers may like to know a few additional scraps of information:

The artist/author of *Skull* #5's "The Shadow from the Abyss" is Larry Todd. Close examination of the final panel reproduction on page 13 of *Dagon* #24 shows the artist has signed his surname disguised as one of the Great Race's mystical instruments. Third from the right, into the centre of the panel, we can clearly see "TODD".

In the early 70s Skywald comics produced three B/W horror magazines modelled on Warren's successful *Creepy* and *Series*. These were *Nightmare*, *Psycho* and *Scream* and the following numbers featured a loosely connected series written by Alan Hewitson (the editor) and various artists entitled "The Shoggoth Series": *Nightmare* #9 (Oct. '72): "The Skull-forest of Old Earth", *Nightmare* #15 (Oct. '73): "This Grotesque Green Earth", *Scream* #1 (Aug. '73): "This Archaic Breeding Ground", *Psycho* #20 (Aug. '74): "The Dead and the Super-dead", *Nightmare* #19 (June '74): "The Vault", *Nightmare* #20 (Aug. '74): "The Scream and the Nightmare".

At the end of the series (the line was suddenly discontinued at the end of 1974) the editor advertised an "international Shoggoth Crusade" inviting readers to participate in the campaign to destroy the "shoggoth threat". The mock crusade included reference to a prospected "expedition to the centre of the earth" in which readers who signed and returned the appropriate form would "willingly join the expedition when it is so organised.."

It's a pity that all this fun stopped so suddenly - in fact the Skywald magazines, though garish were worth reading and featured the occasional gem of script and/or artwork. Copies can be obtained, once traced, quite cheaply - many sell in fine condition at around 50p-75p. The early numbers are more expensive at £1- £5.

Whilst still on the subject of Lovecraft in the comics I recently scanned my collection of Warren's and came across a tale entitled "Innsmouth Festival" which appeared in *Creepy* #56, September 1973. The tale begins with an introduction from Uncle Creepy who acknowledges Lovecraft's influence on the tale. The story tells of "Mr. Harrison Farnsworth...the assistant editor of a very unusual magazine..!" who receives a letter, from a couple of girls who live near Innsmouth, Massachusetts, reporting

of a "macabre festival" involving human sacrifices and "strange creatures in the sea". Following a journey through murky swamps and mud creeks, Farnsworth arrives at Innsmouth. All the inhabitants bear a fish-like resemblance which the investigator puts down to the effects of pollution. But arriving at Dagon's Esoteric Church he finds himself bustling outside and informed that the town are "Not very tolerant of strangers". Farnsworth receives a message from a young girl in an alleyway who leads them to "Dinah and Donna Gilman" the two girls who originally wrote the letter. The reporter is surprised to find that the girls are quite beautiful and bear none of the signs of mutation like the other Innsmouth citizens, but he is alarmed to discover that "A conspiracy of unearthly beings [are attempting to] regain control of the earth that they once ruled freely...before a great conflict cast them out. The natives of Innsmouth are disciples of the sea lord Cthulhu, who lies dreaming in the sunken city of R'lyeh waiting for the proper time to return..."

The girls inform him that one of the festivals aimed at releasing Cthulhu is scheduled for that night and go on to explain that they worship Hastur, Lord of the Air. Suddenly the girls and Farnsworth collapse - the Deep Ones have drugged them. The investigator is left behind and the girls taken to the waterfront and tied to wooden stakes as sacrifices to Cthulhu. Meanwhile Farnsworth awakens and "Knowing that the Innsmouth degenerates worshipped a water diety, it made sense to head for the waterfront" where he finds the villagers and Father Dagon offering the girls to their master. The investigator lowers himself into the water in an attempt to free the girls, just then the giant tentacles of Cthulhu begin to rise from the depths. Amongst the chaos the girls are freed from their bonds and find a laser gun! "Vzzzzzz" Cthulhu and the Deep Ones get it. The two girls and Harrison Farnsworth return to the girls home. The two girls strip off their clothes... "Why are you taking your clothing off...right here?" asks a nervous Farnsworth, to which the girls reply "When we told you we were followers of Hastur, Lord of the Air, we meant it...even down to our wings". The two girls reveal their true bodies and fly upwards adding "Don't worry about us, Farnsworth, we'll be very comfortable hanging from the rafters. Have a good sleep". Great stuff!! The art for "Innsmouth Festival" is by Adolfo Abellan who does a pretty good job, the tacky Derleth approach by the author, John Jacobson adds to the fun. - Ed.

Peter F. Jeffery, Leicester. I approached the S.T. Joshi interview with hopes of enjoying it - & I was not disappointed. I was surprised at how young he is - somehow, I thought that he might be a little older than me, whereas he turns out to be 12 years my junior... Of more lasting interest are things like his no longer enjoying HPL's fiction - but preferring his letters (a view with which I tend to agree). I do diverge on "bad" horror fiction, though - I'm not sure that I don't prefer the "bad" fiction (or some "bad" fiction) to "good" horror fiction. I think I prefer HPL's "bad" fiction (e.g. "The Hound") to his "good" fiction (e.g. "The Dunwich Horror"). Perhaps that's me being irrational. It seems ironic that Joshi has devoted so much effort on stories he's not sure he likes any more... A curious interview with some fascinating insights...

Wayne Mook, Stretford, Manchester. The S.T. Joshi interview was a mouth waterer as far as the Lovecraft scene is concerned.

Mr. Joshi himself sounds rather superior and condescending towards the horror genre, a genre that Wells, Dickens and Waugh ("Mr. Loveday's Outing") thought worthy enough to try their hands at. Joshi appears to have written off most contemporary writing and plumed for tried and tested work,

which is not general literature as he stated, but classic literature. Sturgeon's law applies to all literature, apart from classics of course. But to define classics, first they must be plucked from the chaff & since Mr. Joshi is no longer prepared to do this he will miss the classics of tomorrow.

In defence of Quinn, he wrote for the same editors which butchered Lovecraft. He also seems guilty of adding extra words for those extra cents. This would indicate that he was a professional writer trying to appease the public and thus sell his stories, so his work should be praised since it has survived such great odds.

Simon MacCulloch, Edware, Middlesex. Highlight of the issue was the interview with S. T. Joshi. His comment that "there's more to be dug out of Lovecraft's stories" certainly took on a different complexion in the light of the ensuing revelation. Is the similarity of "S. T. Joshi" to "St. John" entirely coincidental?

It's funny you should mention that... following the revelations regarding S.T.'s graveyard explorations I decided to take a look at the man's background. This is the last rational act I ever performed...Now, as the baying of that dead, fleshless monstrosity grows louder and louder, and the stealthy whirring and flapping of those accursed web-wings circles closer and closer, I shall seek with my revolver the oblivion which is my only refuge from the unnamed and unnamable.

Mark Samuels. I disagree with S. T. Joshi's comments on Stephen King — the final chapter of his novel *Pet Sematary* is just about as Lovecraftian in feel as one can get, & in fact is one of my favourite works of horror. Also worth a look is his short novel "The Mist". Rather than being "verbose & plebian" I think that King's style is set firmly in the times and speaks with the voice of the 'average' man (albeit of American nationality!). As for the misleading "derivative & uninspired" bit, one could make the same claim of any author who drew from past influence. But I wonder whether King doesn't draw from a more modern inspiration (such as the T.V. & cinema) than the literary antecedents of other writers. Nevertheless, I think it's a shame that Joshi should dismiss King in such a manner — there are terrifying moments in his work.

Rob Foyton, London. "Wild Beasts" — an original idea, but the scenario didn't quite work for me — maybe because it's set in such a specific place and time that it's difficult to adapt. I'm also a bit tired of a 'Your 5th cousin, twice removed, who you haven't seen for years, has died and left you...' beginning. Admittedly, thinking up new lead-ins for investigators is difficult, but this one is getting very rusty now. The idea of the lions was good — I've found that players seem to have more trouble with 'ordinary' problems such as these, than with some of the monsters.

Jon Burnside, Marsh, Lancaster. More Penny Love. "Wild Beasts" is one of the best scenarios I've come across. I loved the whole set up of Grey River, its vague mysterious cult, the tired, aging townfolk, the lingering spirits. What really made the scenario special was the descriptive way it was written; it was more than a game supplement, its prose lifted it close to the level of published fiction. The Jeffrey Salmon artwork complimented it beautifully — the use of tone echoing the dusty, time-grained atmosphere of Grey River.

Tim Ellis, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands. "Wild Beasts" is one of the best scenarios I have seen for some time, and would make a wonderful

'first' scenario, in that it requires no Mythos knowledge — the biggest problem with the Chaosium scenarios in *Gaslight* and *Cthulhu Now* is that the Keeper has to write introductory scenarios to get the characters to partake of the published ones.

Mark Samuels. I was not impressed with Penelope Love's "Wild Beasts" scenario. The descriptive passages were extremely atmospheric, & although she managed to avoid the trappings of "Cthulhuism" that bog down many a *Call of Cthulhu* adventure, I feel that she also inadvertently missed the essential *Lovecraftian* aspect. The ending is a bit too stagey, with the balloon coming over at precisely the right moment for the investigators to escape (with the obligatory attempt to give the impression this isn't too easy — 'Climb' rolls up trees, etc.) & in consequence the whole affair has a decidedly histrionic air about it.

Peter F. Jeffery. When one sees Penelope Love's name on a scenario one knows it will be a good one. It seems to me that Penelope's talents are not so well recognised as they ought to be by *Call of Cthulhu* players in this country. (At least so, if those with whom I've corresponded are anything to go by). This may be due to the publication which contains so much of her Cthulhu work, *Terror Australis*, not having received quite the attention it deserves in Britain. She was also co-author of *Tatterdemallion* which, I believe, may be the best *Cthulhu* scenario I have seen — but that work was limited to 50 copies & can have done little to present her material to the public at large.

Penelope Love, Melbourne, Australia. Had a look at the most recent *Dagon* a while ago now, and was most impressed with what you did with "Wild Beasts". Loved the illustrations, especially the lion one, and was appropriately flattered to provide inspiration for the cover. Or was this just coincidence?

Was also suitably impressed with Des Lewis = eerie, weird-me-out things. His stories give me hell everyone that I read, as I crawl back into my dark hole and muse over them. I suppose the nearest thing around to them is Thomas "The Greater Festival of Masks" Ligotti.

Did I ever tell you I wrote a scenario set in Twickenham after I returned to Melbourne in '87. I put you, Pete [Jeffery], Christian Lehman, and a couple of other cool dudes in under sundry aliases, and had rather a ball, but it turned out far too long for a *Dag*, and I never got past the rough stage, called "The Masterwork of Nicholas Forby". You were the old yokel down at the village pub (Red Lion of course) with a rather cute clue. Pete got to be the chatty local doctor, and Christian got to be the person who'd kicked the whole scenario off by dying unpleasantly yonks before the scenario starts. I wonder what that means in terms of the impressions I formed of everybody's characters?

Andre Paine, Tonbridge, Kent. "Digory Smalls" was, as expected, weird. D.F. Lewis's recent tales seem to be more polished. The story in #24 was in some ways similar to "Blasphemy Fitzworth" in *Dark Dreams* #6, if slightly more ambitious.

Jon Burnside. The highlight of the issue for me, was "Digory Smalls" by Des Lewis. His past contributions to *Dagon* ("Foxflesh" & the "Zodical Tales") have been consistently of a high standard but have been ultra-short stories. While there is nothing amiss on this count — "Foxflesh" packing a great punch in just over a page — I have longed to read something lengthier, "Digory Smalls" fulfilled this wonderfully. The saga of William Fitzsimmons & the mutant Digory was compelling and yet darkly humorous (for example the comparison between the female attic-creature's

dripping fluids and "mutant grandchildren's swill breakfasts"). Because there is this element of absurdity in the story it becomes not laughable but, like the she-cousin's squirting pink milk, extremely disquieting. The reader is caught off-guard. The story-within-a-story ending pushes the reader further into shock. The closing remarks about the city's high proportion of unmarried mothers which the populace ignores and the comment "most people you see walking along the city streets have secrets lingering" contrast the unreality of the Fitzsimmons' saga and, like the best horror fiction, forces one to reappraise the world around you. Here's to much more Lewis.

Peter F. Jeffery. "Digory Smalls" is probably the best of Des's stories to be published so far. I offer my hearty congratulations on your perceptiveness in selecting this excellent tale (which has already chalked up at least one rejection — a circumstance I found incomprehensible, I'm glad you're not crazy enough to pass it over).

Readers who enjoy the work of Des Lewis will be pleased to discover that next issue will be another author special devoted entirely to the Weird-monger himself. An unusual amount of mail favoured the B'lyeh Reviews column last time round, in particular the review given to The Unnamable by Kim Newman. Here's what a couple of ghouls chattered...

Rob Poyton. Kim Newman's comments about HPL and the cinema were spot on. Perhaps film-makers think that their audiences won't or can't identify with characters that aren't modern-day American youngsters, and until we get back to the atmosphere of horror rather than the 'who can best simulate meatcleaver wounds' approach that seems to be the style at the moment I don't think we'll see an Al HPL film.

Peter F. Jeffery. In *The Unnamable* review should "Beetle-winged warlock" read "Beetle-winged warlock?" I am quite a fan of the fab four, but don't recall their having wings! [Sorry Pete, the type actually reads 'Beetle-wigged warlock' — hope that now makes sense — Ed]. I cannot recall having previously read a *Dagon* review I enjoyed purely as a piece of writing. (As opposed to a source of information). Great stuff!

And finally, the responses to last issue's Black Mail...

Mark Valentine, Southampton. Mark Samuels invokes me in the letters column on the question whether there is a Machen influence on Thomas Ligotti. This is certainly something I would like to explore, but I feel uneasy about over-much dissection of a living author. With T.E.D. Klein it was different because *The Ceremonies* openly centred on a Machen story so it was clear the author wanted to acknowledge a debt to him. But to answer Mark's question it seems to me the first step is a simple one; ask Thomas Ligotti what he thinks! And in the interview in *Dagon* #22/23, he gives an answer; his main models are Poe and Lovecraft and only "a little Machen". I wouldn't want to argue with that — the author must be the best authority on what has influenced him.

Jon Burnside. I was concerned to read Stephen Newman's comments in "Black Mail". While I take his point on pretension in critical articles, I do feel that relevant, informed criticism of fiction is extremely valid content for *Dagon*. As it is, little written in the genre is accepted by literary critics as having any merit — only recently Poe has been recognised as an important literary figure. It is up to us, "the fans", to demand intelligent criticism of work written in the genre. As yet literary criticism has not found a way it can approach and value work done in the fantasy/horror field — it is up to us to make headway and dispell the

aura of hackwork and exploitation that dims the reputation of the likes of Lovecraft, Campbell and Ligotti.

Rob Poyton. Stephen Newman's letter was interesting. I've found that a brief plot synopsis tends to stir interest more than anything. Unless the story is a last-liner.. "And the butler was really a Deep One" type, I don't see that the plot can be spoilt. After all, how much plot can you have in a four page story? Generally, a short story gathers its strength from its atmosphere or originality of style.

Wayne Mook. I don't agree that critical articles are space fillers but in some ways Mr. Newman is right.

The shock ending, a stock tool in horror, can easily be ruined, plot twists ironed out and as for horror not having 'whodunnits'.to be given away, read *The Dark Cry of the Moon* by Charles L. Grant.

One of the joys of reading new fiction is finding out what the author has in store for us & the critical essay can easily deny the reader this pleasure.

* * * * *

CONTRIBUTING CORPSES

t. Winter-Damon, Peter F. Jeffery, Mark Morrison, Kim Newman, Mark F. Samuels, & Mark Valentine

— *writhing writers*

Dave Carson, Dallas C. Goffin, Allen Koszowski, & Jeffrey Salmon

— *insane illustrators*

Special thanks to Karl Wagner

Carl T. Ford

— *editor*

Published by DAGON PRESS,
11 WARWICK ROAD, TWICKENHAM,
MIDDLESEX TW2 6SW, ENGLAND.

Dagon #26 will be available in August and contents will be devoted to the work of D. F. Lewis. Weird fiction supplied by the author will include "Beyond the Bookcase", "Wiles" "Daughters", "Sponge and China Tea", "Wall Pack", "Mort au Monde", and "Beach Hut". Plus essays on Lewis and a biblio. Cost will be £1.40.

LOVECRAFT ON RECORD

Nicholas Blinko's band, Rudimentary Peni have an album out entitled *Cacophony*, which includes such stuff as "Nightgaunts", "Crazed Couplet", "Beyond the Tanarian Hills", "Arkham Hears", "American Anglophile in the World Turned Upside Down" and lots more wild stuff. The band's style is pretty manic and their distinct garage-cum-punk sound might not be to all readers taste, nevertheless if you don't mind subjecting your ears to a good mind warping damage why not give the album a spin. For more details why not write to Nick at 47 The Crescent, Abbots Langley, Herts., WD5 0DR. Enclose an SAE.

And finally a plug for FANTASYCON XIV, the annual convention of the British Fantasy Society, to be held at the Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham over the weekend 6-8th October '89. Brian Lumley will be this year's Master of Ceremonies and Thomas F. Monteleone is Guest of Honour. Full attending membership costs £12 for BFS members (£14 for non-members). Write to FANTASYCON XIV 15 Stanley Rd., Morden, Surrey SM4 5DE.

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